



# A HUNDRED YEARS OF SEA STORIES

*From Melville to Hemingway*

*Edited by*

LT. CDR. P. K. KEMP, R.N.



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***First published 1915***

***Set in 11 pt. Bembo type and  
printed in Great Britain by Richard Clay and Company, Ltd.  
Bungay, Suffolk  
F.255***

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## SOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THE Publishers express their appreciation of the kindness of the authors, publishers, and others who have given their permission for the inclusion of copyright matter in this book.

'Moby Dick's Last Fight', from *Moby Dick* (1851).

'The Robinson Crusoe of the Polar Regions', from *Tales of Shipwrecks and Adventures at Sea* (3rd Edn. 1847).

'The Brute', from *A Set of Six* (J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd. and the Trustees of the Joseph Conrad Estate).

'Concerning a Treaty with France' and 'Casserbanker the Second', from *The Passing of the Flag Ship* (Chapman & Hall Ltd.).

'A Sea Change', from *A Sack of Shakings* (C. Arthur Pearson Ltd.).

'At Sea', from *Boule de Suif and Other Stories*, trans. H. N. P. Sloman (Penguin Books Ltd.).

'T'Wind' d', from *The Brassbounder* (Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd.).

'The Pleasure of their Company', from *A Make and Mend* (Rich & Cowan Ltd.).

'The Heart's Desire', from *London River* (Cassell & Company Ltd.).

'A Little Drop o' Leaf', from *A Little Ship* (W. & R. Chambers Ltd.).

'The Ghost Ship', from *The Ghost Ship and Other Tales* (Ernest Benn Ltd.).

'A Memory', from *A Tarpaulin Muster* (The Richards Press Ltd.).

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'The Road to the Shore' and 'Perils for Trial', from *Blackwood's Magazine* (Wm. Blackwood & Sons Ltd.).

'Bound for Rio Grande', from *Spin a Yarn Sailor* (George G. Harrap & Company Ltd.).

'The Skipper and El Capitan', from *Afield and Afloat* (Charles Scribner's Sons).

'So We'll Drink . . .', from *The Navy Yearbook* (the Navy League).

'The Conversion of the Rev. T. Ruddell', from *Salt of the Sea* (Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd.).



## FOREWORD

**I** BEG my dear will not be uneasy at my staying out so long,' wrote Admiral Boscawen to his wife in 1756 from the fleet off Brest. 'To be sure, I lose the fruits of the earth, but then I am gathering the flowers of the sea.' This book, too, is a gathering of the flowers of the sea, plucked from that extraordinarily rich garden of our sea literature, which stretches in an unbroken field from the noble prose of Richard Hakluyt and Samuel Purchas to the adventurous tales of C. S. Forester and the grim realities of James Hanley.

It is that richness which makes the selection of sea stories so heart-breaking an affair. To keep within the bounds of a single book inevitably entails the exclusion of some favourite authors from among the long list of those who have a valid claim to favouritism. Even the limitation, in this book, to stories written approximately during the last hundred years, yet leaves so vast a field of choice that it becomes an embarrassment to decide which of the flowers to gather and which to leave still waving in the field.

Some, of course, are irresistible, and inevitably pick themselves. One such is the story with which this collection opens. Even after the lapse of one hundred years, Melville's *Moby Dick* remains, perhaps, the greatest of all sea tales, with the battle with the white whale as the tremendous climax of this tremendous story.

The list of authors whose claim to sea fame during these hundred years must be acknowledged is a prodigious one, and their names trip off the tongue in a seemingly endless stream. The difficulty has been to find a place at which to stop without hurting too deeply the susceptibilities of those readers who will expect to find their own favourites among the elect.

An anthology of sea stories must contain certain names and certain tales, for they choose themselves with an inevitability that brooks no denial. But an anthology such as this gives, too, the chance of bringing forward once again some names that the passage of time and the endless stream of new delights may have dulled into a temporarily undeserved obscurity. To find them again in the company of the immortals is to rekindle an old fire and bask gratefully in its well-remembered warmth.

To me, the search for the unusual and for the partially forgotten proved a particularly happy adventure, opening more doors than I

could, at the time, conveniently enter. But even though the exploration of these new fields remains, as yet, an uncompleted task, they are now well-marked on that mental map of sea literature which the compilation of this book has made necessary. They promise many enchanted journeys in those evenings to come, when a chair, a book, and a library fire represent the summit of human desire. If, to some readers, these stories open similar doors to new explorations in the rich realm of sea literature, then one of the main functions of an anthology will have been achieved.

One particularly happy rediscovery was an early Victorian book of miscellaneous sea writings, James Lindridge's *Tales of Shipwrecks and Adventures at Sea*. The book had a modest success in the late 1840s, achieving the dignity of a third edition, but its success did not endure. Ten years later it had been almost forgotten and it is now a considerable rarity. My own copy had lain for years neglected at the far end of a library shelf, gathering dust in a patient obscurity. It has now produced a Victorian gem in 'The Robinson Crusoe of the Polar Regions', but the choice was not an easy one, for many other gems lay scattered among its 450 pages. That is one door that has still to be fully reopened.

Is it a confession of failure to say that I still have many doubts as to the wisdom of my ultimate choice? So many names have come knocking at the door of memory. But the limits of a single volume are so arbitrarily restricted that, sooner or later, the door must be locked and barred to prevent suffocation within. There are stories that I would have dearly liked to include had the space permitted, and I can only hope, as an example, that the inclusion of stories by Bartimeus and Taffrail will serve as an introduction to those, equally delightful, by three other naval writers who also hide their identity, and equally unsuccessfully, under the pseudonyms of 'Shalimar', 'Klaxon', and 'Sea Wrack'. That master of the nautical story, W. W. Jacobs, is regretfully unrepresented, though it is almost *lèse majesté* to omit him. But in his case an enduring fame makes the omission, perhaps, less heinous, for there can surely be no reader of sea stories who has not chuckled over the memories of his night watchman or delighted in the adventures of Sam Small, Ginger Dick, and Peter Russet.

The great Joseph Conrad wrote but one complete short story about the sea in all his many works, and I have taken it as his contribution to my anthology rather than an excerpt from one of his more famous writings. From America, in addition of course to Herman Melville, and the almost equally well-known story by Ernest Hemingway, comes a moving little tale by A. E. Dingle, 'Bound

for Rio Grande', and a somewhat comic absurdity by Frank Stockton, 'The Skipper and El Capitan'. France is represented by Guy de Maupassant's rather macabre story, 'At Sea'. I was in two, or even three, minds as to which of Major W. P. Drury's many stories to choose, whether one of the inimitable Private Pagett series, or one of those tales with a slightly supernatural twist which Major Drury tells so well. The choice finally fell on one of both. Happy indeed is the reader who has yet to meet Private Pagett and savour the joy of his startling memories.

I hope, too, that the little story by Frank Bullen will prove to be but the prelude to an extended ramble through the pages of his books, and especially to that charming series, 'Country Life on Board Ship', which will be found in *A Sack of Shakings*. If they had not been quite so long they would certainly have appeared in these pages.

Modern writers of sea stories have not been neglected in this collection, although once again the limitations of a single volume have meant a certain hardening of the heart in excluding many names which I would have wished to include. But perhaps I may use once again the same excuse that I employed before and hope that those stories which do appear will but whet the appetite for more, so that readers are encouraged by them to do some modern exploration on their own account. There is much pure gold still awaiting discovery.

P. K. K.



# MOBY DICK'S LAST FIGHT

BY HERMAN MELVILLE

THAT night, in the mid-watch, when the old man—as his wont at intervals—stepped forth from the scuttle in which he leaned, and went to his pivot-hole, he suddenly thrust out his face fiercely, snuffing up the sea air as a sagacious ship's dog will, in drawing nigh to some barbarous isle. He declared that a whale must be near. Soon that peculiar odour, sometimes to a great distance given forth by the living sperm whale, was palpable to all the watch; nor was any mariner surprised when, after inspecting the compass, and then the dog-vane, and then ascertaining the precise bearing of the odour as nearly as possible, Ahab rapidly ordered the ship's course to be slightly altered, and the sail to be shortened.

The acute policy dictating these movements was sufficiently vindicated at daybreak by the sight of a long sleek on the sea directly and lengthwise ahead, smooth as oil, and resembling in the pleated watery wrinkles bordering it, the polished metallic-like marks of some swift tide-rip, at the mouth of a deep, rapid stream.

'Man the mastheads! Call all hands!'

Thundering with the butts of three clubbed handspikes on the forecastle deck, Daggoo roused the sleepers with such judgement claps that they seemed to exhale from the scuttle, so instantaneously did they appear with their clothes in their hands.

'What d'ye see?' cried Ahab, flattening his face to the sky.

'Nothing, nothing, sir!' was the sound hailing down in reply.

'T'gallant-sails! stunsails aloof and aloft, and on both sides!'

All sail being set, he now cast loose the life-line, reserved for swaying him to the mainroyal masthead; and in a few moments they were hoisting him thither, when, while but two-thirds of the way aloft, and while peering ahead through the horizontal vacancy between the maintopsail and top-gallant-sail, he raised a gull-like cry to the air, 'There she blows!—there she blows! A hump like a snow-hill! It is Moby Dick!'

Fired to, the cry which seemed simultaneously taken up by the three look-outs, the men on deck rushed to the rigging to behold the famous whale they had so long been pursuing. Ahab had now gained



his final perch, some feet above the other look-outs, Tashtego standing just beneath him on the cap of the top-gallant-mast, so that the Indian's head was almost on a level with Ahab's heel. From this height the whale was now seen some mile or so ahead, at every roll of the sea revealing his high sparkling hump, and regularly jetting his silent spout into the air. To the credulous mariners it seemed the same silent spout they had so long ago beheld in the moonlit Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

'And did none of ye see it before?' cried Ahab, hailing the perched men all around him.

'I saw him almost the same instant, sir, that Captain Ahab did, and I cried out,' said Tashtego.

'Not the same instant; not the same—no, the doubloon is mine, Fate reserved the doubloon for me. *I* only; none of ye could have raised the White Whale first. There she blows; there she blows! There she blows! There again!—there again!' he cried, in long-drawn, lingering, methodic tones, attuned to the gradual prolongings of the whale's visible jets. 'He's going to sound! In stunsails! Down top-gallant-sails! Stand by three boats. Mr. Starbuck, remember, stay on board, and keep the ship. Helm there! Luff, luff a point! So; steady, man, steady! There go flukes. No, no; only black water! All ready the boats there; Stand by, stand by! Lower me, Mr. Starbuck; lower lower,—quick, quicker!' and he slid through the air to the deck.

'He is heading straight to leeward, sir,' cried Stubb; 'right away from us; cannot have seen the ship yet.'

'Be dumb, man! Stand by the braces! Hard down the helm!—brace up! Shiver her!—shiver her! So; well that! Boats, boats!'

Soon all the boats but Starbuck's were dropped; the boat-sails set; all the paddles plying; with rippling swiftness, shooting to leeward; and Ahab heading the onset. A pale, death-glimmer lit up Fedallah's sunken eyes; a hideous motion gnawed his mouth.

Like noiseless nautilus shells, their light prows sped through the sea; but only slowly they neared the foe. As they neared him the ocean grew still more smooth; seemed drawing a carpet over its waves; seemed a noon-meadow, so serenely it spread. At length the breathless hunter came so nigh his seemingly unsuspecting prey, that his entire dazzling hump was distinctly visible, sliding along the sea as if an isolated thing, and continually set in a revolving ring of finest, fleecy, greenish foam. He saw the vast involved wrinkles of the slightly projecting head beyond. Before it, far out on the soft Turkish-rugged waters, went the glistening white shadows from his broad, milky forehead, a musical rippling playfully accompanying the shade; and behind, the blue waters interchangeably flowed over

into the moving valley of his steady wake; and on either hand bright bubbles arose and danced by his side. But these were broken again by the light toes of hundreds of gay fowl softly feathering the sea, alternate with their fitful flight; and like to some flagstaff rising from the painted hull of an argosy, the tall but shattered pole of a recent lance projected from the white whale's back; and at intervals one of the cloud of soft-toed fowls hovering, and to and fro skimming like a canopy over the fish, silently perched and rocked on this pole, the long tail feathers streaming like pennons.

A gentle joyousness—a mighty mildness of repose in swiftness, invested the gliding whale. Not the white bull Jupiter swimming away with ravished Europa clinging to his graceful horns; his lovely, leering eyes sideways intent upon the maid; with smooth bewitching fleetness, rippling straight for the nuptial bower in Crete; not Jove did surpass the glorified White Whale as he so divinely swam.

On each soft side—coincident with the parted swell, that but once leaving him, then flowed so wide away—on each bright side, the whale shed off enticings. No wonder there had been some among the hunters who namelessly transported and allured by all this serenity had ventured to assail it; but had fatally found that quietude but the vesture of tornadoes. Yet, calm, enticing calm, oh, whale! thou glidest on, to all who for the first time eye thee, no matter how many in that same way thou may'st have bejuggled and destroyed before.

And thus, through the serene tranquilities of the tropical sea, among waves whose hand-clappings were suspended by exceeding rapture, Moby Dick moved on, still withholding from sight the full terrors of his submerged trunk, entirely hiding the wretched hideousness of his jaw. But soon the fore part of him slowly rose from the water; for an instant his whole marbleised body formed a high arch, like Virginia's Natural Bridge, and warningly waving his bannered flukes in the air. The grand god revealed himself, sounded, and went out of sight. Hoveringly halting, and dipping on the wing, the white sea-fowls longingly lingered over the agitated pool that he left.

With oars apeak, and paddles down, the sheets of their sails adrift, the three boats now stilly floated, awaiting Moby Dick's appearance.

'An hour,' said Ahab, standing rooted in his boat's stern, and he gazed beyond the whale's place, towards the dim blue spaces and wide wooing vacancies to leeward. It was only an instant, for again his eyes seemed whirling round in his head as he swept the watery circle. The breeze now freshened; the sea began to swell.

'The birds!—the birds!' cried Tashtego.

In long Indian file, as when herons take wing, the white birds were now all flying towards Ahab's boat; and when within a few yards began fluttering over the water there, wheeling round and round, with joyous, expectant cries. Their vision was keener than man's; Ahab could discover no sign in the sea. But suddenly as he peered down and into its depths, he profoundly saw a white living spot no bigger than a white weasel, with a wonderful celerity uprising, and magnifying as it rose, till it turned, and then there were plainly revealed two long crooked rows of white, glistening teeth, floating up from the undiscoverable bottom. It was Moby Dick's open mouth and scrolled jaw; his vast, shadowed bulk still half blending with the blue of the sea. The glittering mouth yawned beneath the boat like an open-doored marble tomb; and giving one sidelong sweep with his steering oar, Ahab whirled the craft aside from this tremendous apparition. Then, calling upon Fedallah to change places with him, went forward to the bows, and seizing Perth's harpoon, commanded his crew to grasp their oars and stand by to stern.

Now, by reason of this timely spinning round the boat upon its axis, its bow, by anticipation, was made to face the whale's head while yet under water. But as if perceiving this stratagem, Moby Dick, with that malicious intelligence ascribed to him, sidelingly transplanted himself, as it were, in an instant, shooting his plaited head lengthwise beneath the boat.

Through and through; through every plank and each rib, it thrilled for an instant, the whale obliquely lying on his back, in the manner of a biting shark, slowly and feelingly taking its bows full within his mouth, so that the long, narrow, scrolled lower-jaw curled high up into the open air, and one of the teeth caught in a rowlock. The bluish pearl-white of the inside of the jaw was within six inches of Ahab's head, and reached higher than that. In this altitude the White Whale now shook the slight cedar as a mildly cruel cat her mouse. With unastonished eyes Fedallah gazed, and crossed his arms; but the tiger-yellow crew were tumbling over each other's heads to gain the uttermost stern.

And now, while both elastic gunwales were springing in and out, as the whale dallied with the doomed craft in this devilish way; and from his body being submerged beneath the boat, he could not be darted at from the bows, for the bows were almost inside of him, as it were; and while the other boats involuntarily paused, as before a quick crisis impossible to withstand, then it was that monomaniac Ahab, furious with this tantalizing vicinity of his foe, which placed him all alive and helpless in the very jaws he hated; frenzied with all

this, he seized the long bone with his naked hands, and wildly strove to wrench it from its grip. As he now thus vainly strove, the jaw slipped from him; the frail gunwales bent in, collapsed and snapped, as both jaws, like an enormous shears, sliding further aft, bit the craft completely in twain, and locked themselves fast again in the sea, midway between the two floating wrecks. These floated aside, the broken ends drooping, the crew at the sternwreck clinging to the gunwales, and striving to hold fast to the oars to lash them across.

At that prelude moment, ere the boat was yet snapped, Ahab, the first to perceive the whale's intent, by the crafty upraising of his head, a movement that loosed his hold for the time; at that moment his hand had made one final effort to push the boat out of the bite. But only slipping further into the whale's mouth, and tilting over sideways as it slipped, the boat had shaken off his hold on the jaw; spilled him out of it, as he leaned to the push; and so he fell flat-faced upon the sea.

Ringlingly withdrawing from his prey, Moby Dick now lay at a little distance, vertically thrusting his oblong white head up and down in the billows; and at the same time slowly revolving his whole splendid body; so that when his vast wrinkled forehead rose—some twenty or more feet out of the water—the now rising swells, with all their confluent waves, dazzling broke against it; vindictively tossing their snivered spray still higher into the air. So, in a gale, the but half baffled Channel billows only recoil from the base of the Eddystone, triumphantly to overlap its summit with their scud.

But soon resuming his horizontal attitude, Moby Dick swam swiftly round and round the wrecked crew; sideways churning the water in his vengeful wake, as if lashing himself up to still another and more deadly assault. The sight of the splintered boat seemed to madden him, as the blood of grapes and mulberries cast before Antiochus's elephants in the book of Maccabees. Meanwhile Ahab half smothered in the foam of the whale's insolent tail, and too much of a cripple to swim,—though he could still keep afloat, even in the heart of such a whirlpool as that; helpless Ahab's head was seen, like a tossed bubble which the least chance shock might burst. From the boat's fragmentary stern, Fedallah incuriously and mildly eyed him; the clinging crew, at the other drifting end, could not succour him; more than enough was it for them to look to themselves. For so revolvingly appalling was the White Whale's aspect, and so planetarily swift the ever-contracting circles he made, that he seemed horizontally swooping upon them. And though the other boats, unharmed, still hovered hard by, still they dared not pull into the eddy to strike, lest that should be the signal for the instant destruction of

the jeopardized castaways, Ahab and all; nor in that case could they themselves hope to escape. With straining eyes, then, they remained on the outer edge of the direful zone, whose centre had now become the old man's head.

Meantime, from the beginning all this had been descried from the ship's mastheads; and squaring her yards, she had borne down upon the scene; and was now so nigh, that Ahab in the water hailed her;—'Sail on the'—but that moment a breaking sea dashed on him from Moby Dick, and whelmed him for the time. But struggling out of it again, and chancing to rise on a towering crest, he shouted,—'Sail on the whale!—Drive him off!'

The *Pequod's* prows were pointed; and breaking up the charmed circle, she effectually parted the White Whale from his victim. As he sullenly swam off, the boats flew to the rescue.

Dragged into Stubb's boat with bloodshot blinded eyes, the white brine caking in his wrinkles; the long tension of Ahab's bodily strength did crack, and helplessly he yielded to his body's doom: for a time, lying all crushed in the bottom of Stubb's boat, like one trodden under foot of herds of elephants. Far inland, nameless wails came from him, as desolate sounds from our ravines.

But the intensity of his physical prostration did but so much the more abbreviate it. In an instant's compass, great hearts sometimes condense to one deep pang, the sum-total of those shallow pains kindly diffused through feeble men's whole lives. And so, such hearts, though summary in each one suffering; still, if the gods decree it, in their lifetime aggregate a whole age of woe, wholly made up of instantaneous intensities; for even in their pointless centres those noble natures contain the entire circumference of inferior souls.

'The harpoon,' said Ahab, half-way rising, and draggingly leaning on one bended arm—'is it safe?'

'Aye, sir, for it was not darted; this is it,' said Stubb, showing it.

'Say it before me;—any missing men?'

'One, two, three, four, five;—there were five oars, sir, and here are five men.'

'That's good.—Help me, man; I wish to stand. So, so, I see him! there! there! going to leeward still? what a leaping spout!—Hands off from me! The eternal sap runs in Ahab's bones again! Set the sail; out oars; the helm!'

It is often the case that when a boat is stove, its crew, being picked up by another boat, help to work that second boat; and the chase is thus continued with what is called double-banked oars. It was thus now. But the added power of the boat did not equal the added power of the whale, for he seemed to have treble-banked his every fin;

swimming with a velocity which plainly showed, that if now, under these circumstances, pushed on, the chase would prove an indefinitely prolonged, if not a hopeless one; nor could any crew endure for so long a period, such an unintermitted, intense straining at the oar; a thing barely tolerable only in some one brief vicissitude. The ship itself, then, as it sometimes happens, offered the most promising intermediate means of overtaking the chase. Accordingly, the boats now made for her, and were soon swayed up to their cranes—the two parts of the wrecked boat having been previously secured by her—and then hoisting everything to her side, and stacking the canvas high up, and sideways outstretching it with stunsails, like the double-jointed wings of an albatross; the *Pequod* bore down in the leeward wake of Moby Dick. At the well-known, methodical intervals, the whale's glittering spout was regularly announced from the manned mastheads; and when he would be reported as just gone down, Ahab would take the time, and then pacing the deck, binnacle-watch in hand, so soon as the last sound of the allotted hour expired, his voice was heard—'Whose is the doubloon now? D'y'e see him?' and if the reply was 'No, sir!' straightway he commanded them to lift him to his perch. In this way, the day wore on; Ahab now aloft and motionless; anon, unrestingly pacing the planks.

As he was thus walking, uttering no sound, except to hail the men aloft, or to bid them hoist a sail still higher, or to spread one to a still greater breadth—thus to and fro pacing, beneath his slouched hat, at every turn he passed his own wrecked boat, which had been dropped upon the quarter-deck, and lay there reversed, broken bow to shattered stern. At last he paused before it; and as in an already over-clouded sky fresh troops of clouds will sometimes sail across, so over the old man's face there now stole some such added gloom as this.

Stubb saw him pause; and perhaps intending, not vainly, though, to evince his own unabated fortitude, and thus keep up a valiant place in his Captain's mind, he advanced, and eyeing the wreck exclaimed—'The thistle the ass refused; it pricked his mouth too keenly sir; ha! ha!'

'What soulless thing is this that laughs before a wreck? Man, man! did I not know thee brave as fearless fire (and as mechanical) I could swear thou wert a poltroon. Groan nor laugh should be heard before a wreck.'

'Aye, sir,' said Starbuck, drawing near, 'tis a solemn sight; an omen, and an ill one.'

'Omen? omen?—the dictionary! If the gods think to speak outright to : an, they will honourably speak outright; not shake their

heads, and give an old wife's darkling hint.—Begone! Ye two are the opposite poles of one thing! Starbuck is Stubb reversed, and Stubb is Starbuck; and ye two are all mankind; and Ahab stands alone among the millions of the peopled earth, nor gods nor men his neighbours! Cold, cold—I shiver!—How now? Aloft there? D'ye see him? Sing out for every spout, though he spout ten times a second!

The day was nearly done; only the hem of his golden robe was rustling. Soon, it was almost dark, but the look-out men still remained unset.

'Can't see the spout now, sir;—too dark'—cried a voice from the air.

'How heading when last seen?'

'As before, sir—straight to leeward.'

'Good! he will travel slower now 'tis night. Down royals and top-gallant stunsails, Mr. Starbuck. We must not run over him before morning; he's making a passage now, and may heave-to a while. Helm there! keep her full before the wind!—Aloft! come down!—Mr. Stubb, send a fresh hand to the foremast head, and see it manned till morning.'—Then advancing towards the doubloon in the main-mast—'Men, this gold is mine, for I earned it; but I shall let it abide here till the White Whale is dead; and then, whosoever of ye first raises him, upon the day he shall be killed, this gold is that man's; and if on that day I shall again raise him, then, ten times its sum shall be divided among all of ye! Away now!—the deck is thine, Sir.'

And so saying, he placed himself half-way within the scuttle, and slouching his hat, stood there till dawn, except when at intervals rousing himself to see how the night wore on.

At daybreak the three mastheads were punctually manned afresh.

'D'ye see him?' cried Ahab after allowing a little space for the light to spread.

'See nothing, sir.'

'Turn up all hands and make sail! he travels faster than I thought for;—the top-gallant sails!—aye, they should have been kept on her all night. But no matter—'tis but resting for the rush.'

The ship tore on, leaving such a furrow in the sea as when a cannon-ball, missent, becomes a ploughshare and turns up the level field.

'By salt and hemp!' cried Stubb, 'but this swift motion of the deck creeps up one's legs and tingles at the heart. This ship and I are two grave fellows! Ha! ha! Someone take me up, and launch me, spine-wise, on the sea, for by live-oaks! my spine's a keel. Ha, ha! we go the gait that leaves no dust behind.'

'There she blows—she blows!—right ahead!' was now the masthead cry.



'Aye, aye!' cried Stubb, 'I knew it—ye can't escape—blow on and split your spout, O Whale! the mad fiend himself is after ye! Blow your trump—blister your lungs! Ahab will dam off your blood, as a miller shuts his water-gate upon the stream.'

And Stubb did but speak out for well-nigh all that crew. The frenzies of the chase had by this time worked them bubblingly up, like old wine worked anew. Whatever pale fears and forebodings some of them might have felt before; these were not only now kept out of sight through the growing awe of Ahab, but they were broken up, and on all sides routed, as timid prairie hares that scatter before the bounding bison. The hand of Fate had snatched all their souls; and by the stirring perils of the previous day; the rack of the past night's suspense; the fixed unfearing, blind, reckless way in which their wild craft went plunging towards its flying mark; by all these things, their hearts were bowled along. The wind that made great bellies of their sails, and rushed the vessel on by arms invisible as irresistible; this seemed the symbol of that unseen agency which so enslaved them to the race.

They were one man, not thirty. For as the one ship that held them all, though it was put together of all contrasting things—oak, and maple, and pine wood; iron, and pitch, and hemp—yet all these ran into each other in the one concrete hull, which shot on its way, both balanced and directed by the long central keel; even so, all the individualities of the crew. This man's valour, that man's fear; guilt and guiltiness, all varieties were welded into oneness, and were all directed to that fatal goal which Ahab their one lord and keel did point to.

The rigging lived. The mastheads, like the tops of tall palms, were out-spreadingly tufted with arms and legs. Clinging to a spar with one hand, some reached forth the other with impatient wavings; others, shading their eyes from the vivid sunlight, sat far out on the rocking yards; all the spars in full bearing of mortals, ready and ripe for their fate. Ah! how they still strove through that infinite blueness to seek out the thing that might destroy them!

'Why sing ye not out for him, if ye see him?' cried Ahab, when, after the lapse of some minutes since the first cry, no more had been heard. 'Sway me up, men; ye have been deceived; not Moby Dick casts one odd jet that way, and then disappears.'

It was even so; in their headlong eagerness, the men had mistaken some other thing for the whale-spout, as the event itself soon proved; for hardly had Ahab reached his perch; hardly was the rope belayed to its pin on deck, when he struck the key-note to an orchestra, that made the air vibrate as with the combined discharges of rifles. The



triumphant halloo of thirty buckskin lungs was heard, as—much nearer to the ship than the place of the imaginary jet, less than a mile ahead—Moby Dick bodily burst into view. For not by any calm and indolent spoutings, not by the peaceable gush of that mystic fountain in his head, did the White Whale now reveal his vicinity; but by far the more wondrous phenomenon of breaching. Rising with his utmost velocity from the furthest depths, the Sperin Whale thus booms his entire bulk into the pure element of air, and piling up a mountain of dazzling foam, shows his place to the distance of seven miles and more. In those moments, the torn, enraged waves he shakes off seem his mane; in some cases this breaching is his act of defiance.

'There she breaches! there she breaches!' was the cry, as in his immeasurable bravadoes the White Whale tossed himself salmon-like to Heaven. So suddenly seen in the blue plain of the sea, and relieved against the still bluer margin of the sky, the spray that he raised, for the moment, intolerably glittered and glared like a glacier; and stood there gradually fading away from its first sparkling intensity, to the dim and fading mistiness of an advancing shower in a vale.

'Aye, breach your last to the sun, Moby Dick!' cried Ahab, 'thy hour and thy harpoon are at hand! Down! down all of ye, but one man at the fore. The boats!—stand by!'

Unmindful of the tedious rope-ladders of the shrouds, the men, like shooting stars, slid to the deck, by the isolated backstays and hal-yards; while Ahab, less dartingly, but still rapidly, was dropped from his perch.

'Lower away,' he cried, so soon as he had reached his boat—a spare one, rigged the afternoon previous. 'Mr. Starbuck, the ship is thine—keep away from the boats, but keep near them. Lower all!'

As if to strike a quick terror into them, by this time being the first assailant himself, Moby Dick had turned, and was now coming for the three crews. Ahab's boat was central; and cheering his men, he told them he would take the whale head-and-head,—that is, pull straight up to his forehead,—a not uncommon thing; for when within a certain limit, such a course excludes the coming onset from the whale's sidelong vision. But ere that close limit was gained, and while yet all three boats were plain as the ship's three masts to his eye; the White Whale, churning himself into furious speed, almost in an instant as it were, rushing among the boats with open jaws, and lashing tail, offered appalling battle on every side; and heedless of the irons darted at him from every boat, seemed only intent on annihilating each separate plank of which those boats were made. But skilfully manœuvred, incessantly wheeling like trained chargers

in the field; the boats for a while eluded him; though, at times, but by a plank's breadth; while all the time, Ahab's unearthly slogan tore every other cry but his to shreds.

But at last in his untraceable evolutions, the White Whale so crossed and recrossed, and in a thousand ways entangled the slack of the three lines now fast to him, that they foreshortened, and, of themselves, warped the devoted boats towards the planted irons in him; though now for a moment the whale drew aside a little, as if to rally for a more tremendous charge. Seizing that opportunity, Ahab first paid out more line; and then was rapidly hauling and jerking in upon it again—hoping that way to disencumber it of some snarls when lo!—a sight more savage than the embattled teeth of sharks!

Caught and twisted—corkscrewed in the mazes of the line—loose harpoons and lances, with all their bristling barbs and points, came flashing and dripping up to the chocks in the bows of Ahab's boat. Only one thing could be done. Seizing the boat-knife, he critically reached within—through—and then, without—the rays of steel; dragged in the line beyond, passed it, inboard, to the bowsman, and then, twice sundering the rope near the chocks—dropped the intercepted fagot of steel into the sea; and was all fast again. That instant, the White Whale made a sudden rush among the remaining tangles of the other lines, by so doing, irresistibly dragged the more involved boats of Stubb and Flask towards his flukes; dashed them together like two rolling husks on a surf-beaten beach, and then, diving down into the sea, disappeared in a coiling maelstrom, in which, for a space, the odorous cedar chips of the wrecks danced round and round, like the grated nutmeg in a swiftly stirred bowl of punch.

While the two crews were yet circling in the waters, reaching out after the revolving line-tubs, oars, and other floating furniture, while aslope little Flask bobbed up and down like an empty vial, twitching his legs upwards to escape the dreaded jaws of sharks; and Stubb was lustily singing out for someone to ladle him up, and while the old man's line—now parting—admitted of his pulling into the creamy pool to rescue whom he could—in that wild simultaneousness of a thousand concentered perils,—Ahab's yet unstricken boat seemed drawn up towards Heaven by invisible wires,—as, arrow-like, shooting perpendicularly from the sea, the White Whale dashed his broad forehead against its bottom, and sent it, turning over and over, into the air; till it fell again—gunwale downwards—and Ahab and his men struggled out from under it, like souls from a seaside cave.

The first uprising momentum of the whale—modifying its direction as he struck the surface—involuntarily launched him along it,

to a little distance from the centre of the destruction he had made; and with his back to it, he now lay for a moment slowly feeling with his flukes from side to side; and whenever a stray oar, bit of plank, the least chip or crumb of the boats touched his skin, his tail swiftly drew back, and came sideways, smiting the sea. But soon, as if satisfied that his work for the time was done, he pushed his plaited forehead through the ocean, and trailing after him the intertangled lines, continued his leeward way at a traveller's methodic pace.

As before, the attentive ship having descried the whole fight, again came bearing down to the rescue, and dropping a boat, picked up the floating mariners, tubs, oars, and whatever else could be caught at, and safely landed them upon her decks. Some sprained shoulders, wrists, and ankles; livid contusions; wrenched harpoons and lances; inextricable intricacies of rope; shattered oars and planks; all these were there; but no fatal or even serious ill seemed to have befallen anyone. As with Fedallah the day before, so Ahab was now found grimly clinging to this boat's broken half, which offered a comparatively easy float; nor did it exhaust him as the previous day's mishap.

But when he was helped to the deck, all eyes were fastened upon him; as instead of standing by himself he still half-clung upon the shoulder of Starbuck, who had thus far been the foremost to assist him. His ivory leg had been snapped off, leaving but one short sharp splinter.

'Aye, aye, Starbuck, 'tis sweet to lean sometimes, be the leaner who he will; and would old Ahab had leaned oftener than he has.'

'The ferrule has not stood, sir,' said the carpenter, now coming up; 'I put good work into that leg.'

'But no bones broken, sir, I hope,' said Stubb with true concern.

'Aye! and all splintered to pieces, Stubb! d'ye see it? But even with a broken bone, old Ahab is untouched; and I account no living bone of mine one jot more me than this dead one that's lost. Nor white whale, nor man, nor fiend, can so much as graze old Ahab in his own proper and inaccessible being. Can any lead touch yonder floor, any mast scrape yonder roof? Aloft there! which way?'

'Dead to leeward, sir.'

'Up helm, then; pile on the sail again, shipkeepers; down the rest of the spare boats and rig them—Mr. Starbuck, away, and muster the boats' crews.'

'Let me first help thee towards the bulwarks, sir.'

'Oh, oh, oh! how this splinter gores me now! Accursed fate! that the unconquerable captain in the soul should have such a craven mate!'

'Sir?'

'My body, man, not thee. Give me something for a cane—there, that shivered lance will do. Muster the men. Surely I have not seen him yet. By heaven, it cannot be!—missing?—quick! call them all.'

The old man's hinted thought was true. Upon mustering the company, the Parsee was not there.

'The Parsee!' cried Stubb, 'he must have been caught in——'

'The black vomit wrench thee! Run all of ye above, aloft, cabin, forecabin—find him—not gone—not gone!'

But quickly they returned to him with the tidings that the Parsee was nowhere to be found.

'Aye, sir,' said Stubb—'caught among the tangles of your line. I thought I saw him dragged under.'

'My line? My line? Gone? Gone? What means that little word? What death-knell rings in it, that old Ahab shakes as if he were the belfry. The harpoon, too! Toss over the litter there, d'ye see it?—the forged iron, men, the white whale's—no, no, no, blistered fool! this hand did dart it! 'Tis in the fish! Aloft there! Keep him nailed. Quick! all hands to the rigging of the boats—collect the oars—harpooners! the irons, the irons! Hoist the royals higher—a pull on all the sheets! Helm there! steady, steady, for your life! I'll ten times girdle the unmeasured globe; yea and dive straight through it, but I'll slay him yet!'

'Great God! but for one single instant show thyself,' cried Starbuck. 'Never, never wilt thou capture him, old man. In Jesus' name, no more of this, that's worse than devil's madness. Two days chased; twice stove to splinters; thy very leg once more snatched from under thee; thy evil shadow gone—all good angels mobbing thee with warnings; what more wouldst thou have? Shall we keep chasing this murderous fish till he swamps the last man? Shall we be dragged by him to the bottom of the sea? Shall we be towed by him to the infernal world? Oh, oh! Impiety and blasphemy to hunt him more!'

'Starbuck, of late I've felt strangely moved to thee; ever since that hour we both saw—thou know'st what, in one another's eyes. But in this matter of the whale, be the front of thy face to me as the palm of this hand—a lipless, unfeatured blank. Ahab is for ever Ahab, man. This whole act's immutably decreed. 'Twas rehearsed by thee and me a billion years before this ocean rolled. Fool! I am the Fates' lieutenant; I act under orders. Look thou, underling! that thou obeyest mine. Stand round me, men. Ye see an old man cut down to the stump; leaning on a shivered lance; propped up on a lonely foot. 'Tis Ahab—his body's part; but Ahab's soul's a centipede, that moves upon a hundred legs. I feel strained, half stranded, as ropes that tow

dismasted frigates in a gale; and I may look so. But ere I break, ye'll hear me crack; and till ye hear *that*, know that Ahab's hawser tows his purpose yet. Believe ye, men, in the things called omens? Then laugh aloud, and cry encore! For ere they drown, drowning things will twice rise to the surface; then rise again, to sink for evermore. So with Moby Dick—two days he's floated—to-morrow will be the third. Aye, men, he'll rise once more—but only to spout his last.'

The morning of the third day dawned fair and fresh, and once more the solitary night-man at the fore-masthead was relieved by crowds of the daylight look-outs, who dotted every mast and almost every spar.

'D'ye see him?' cried Ahab. 'Aloft there. What d'ye see?'

'Nothing, sir.'

'Nothing! The doubloon goes a-begging! See the sun! Aye, aye, it must be so. I've over-sailed him. How, got the start? Aye, he's chasing *me*, now; not I, *him*—that's bad. I might have known it, too. Fool! the lines—the harpoons he's towing. Aye, aye, I have run him by last night. About! About! Come down, all of ye, but the regular look-outs! Man the braces!'

Steering as she had done, the wind had been somewhat on the *Pequod's* quarter, so that now being pointed in the reverse direction, the braced ship sailed hard upon the breeze as she recharged the cream in her own white wake.

'Against the wind he now steers for the open jaw,' murmured Starbuck to himself, as he coiled the new-hauled main-brace upon the rail. 'God keep us, but already my bones feel damp within me, and from the inside wet my flesh. I misdoubt me that I disobeyed my God in obeying him!'

'Stand by to sway me up!' cried Ahab, advancing to the hempen basket. 'We should meet him soon.'

'Aye, aye, sir,' and straightway Starbuck did Ahab's bidding, and once more Ahab swung on high.

A whole hour now passed; gold-beaten out to ages. Time itself now held long breaths with keen suspense. But at last, some three points off the weather-bow, Ahab descried the spout again, and instantly from the three mastheads three shrieks went up as if the tongues of fire had voiced it.

'Forehead to forehead I meet thee, this third time, Moby Dick! On deck there! Brace sharper up; crowd her into the wind's eye. He's too far off to lower yet, Mr. Starbuck. The sails shake! Stand over that helmsman with a topmaul! So, so he travels fast, and I must down.'

He gave the word, and still gazing round him, was steadily lowered through the cloven blue air to the deck.

In due time the boats were lowered; but as standing in his shallop's stern, Ahab just hovered upon the point of the descent, he waved to the mate, who held one of the tackle-ropes on deck, and bade him pause.

'Starbuck!'

'Sir?'

'For the third time my soul's ship starts upon this voyage, Starbuck.'

'Aye, sir, thou wilt have it so.'

'Some ships sail from their ports, and ever afterwards are missing, Starbuck! Some men die at ebb tide; some at low water; some at the full of the flood; and I feel now like a billow that's all one crested comb, Starbuck. Lower away! Stand by the crew!'

In an instant the boat was pulling round close under the stern.

'The sharks! the sharks!' cried a voice from the low cabin-window there. 'O master, my master, come back!'

But Ahab heard nothing; for his own voice was highlifted then; and the boat leaped on.

Yet the voice spake true; for scarce had he pushed from the ship, when numbers of sharks, seemingly rising from out the dark waters beneath the hull, maliciously snapped at the blades of the oars, every time they dipped in the water; and in this way accompanied the boat with their bites. It is a thing not uncommonly happening to the whale-boats in those swarming seas; the sharks at times apparently following them in the same prescient way that vultures hover over the banners of marching regiments in the east. But these were the first sharks that had been observed by the *Pequod* since the White Whale had been first descried; and whether it was that Ahab's crew were all such tiger-yellow barbarians, and therefore their flesh more musky to the senses of sharks—a matter sometimes well known to affect them—however it was, they seemed to follow that one boat without molesting the others.

'Heart of wrought steel,' murmured Starbuck, gazing over the side, and following with his eyes the receding boat, 'canst thou yet ring boldly to that sight? lowering thy keel among ravening sharks, and followed by them, open-mouthed, to the chase; and this the critical third day? For when three days flow together in one continuous intense pursuit, be sure the first in the morning, the second the noon, and the third the evening and the end of that thing—be that end what it may.'

The boats had not gone very far, when by a signal from the mast-heads—downward pointed arm, Ahab knew that the whale had

sounded; but intending to be near him at the next rising, he held on his way a little sideways from the vessel; the becharmed crew maintaining the profoundest silence, as the head-beat waves hammered and hammered against the opposing bow.

Suddenly the waters around them slowly swelled in broad circles, then quickly upheaved, as if sideways sliding from a submerged berg of ice, swiftly rising to the surface. A low rumbling sound was heard; a subterranean hum; and then all held their breaths; as bedraggled with trailing ropes, and harpoons, and lances, a vast form shot lengthwise, but obliquely from the sea. Shrouded in a thin drooping veil of mist, it hovered for a moment in the rainbowed air; and then fell swamping back into the deep. Crushed thirty feet upwards, the waters flashed for an instant like heaps of fountains, then brokenly sank in a shower of flakes, leaving the circling surface creamed like new milk round the marble trunk of the whale.

'Give way!' cried Ahab to the oarsmen and the boats darted forward to the attack; but maddened by yesterday's fresh irons that corroded in him, Moby Dick seemed combinedly possessed by all the angels that fell from heaven. The wide tiers of welded tendons overspreading his broad white forehead, beneath the transparent skin, looked knitted together; as head on, he came churning his tail among the boats; and once more flailed them apart; spilling out the irons and lances from the two mates' boats, and dashing in one side of the upper part of their bows, but leaving Ahab's almost without a scar.

While Daggoo and Queequeg were stopping the strained planks; and as the whale swimming out from them, turned, and showed one entire flank as he shot by them again; at that moment a quick cry went up. Lashed round and round to the fish's back; pinioned in the turns upon turns in which, during the past night, the whale had reeled the involutions of the lines around him, the half-torn body of the Parsee was seen; his sable raiment frayed to shreds; his distended eyes turned full upon old Ahab.

The harpoon dropped from his hand.

'Befooled, befooled!'—drawing in a long lean breath—'Aye, Parsee! I see thee again. Aye, and thou goest before; and this, *this* then is the hearse that thou didst promise. But I hold thee to the last letter of thy word. Where is the second hearse? Away, mates, to the ship! Those boats are useless now; repair them if ye can in time, and return to me; if not, Ahab is enough to die. Down, men! the first thing that but offers to jump from this boat I stand in, that thing I harpoon. Ye are not other men, but my arms and legs; and so obey me. Where's the whale? gone down again?'

But he looked too nigh the boat; for as if bent upon escaping with the corpse he bore, and as if the particular place of the last encounter had been but a stage in his leeward voyage, Moby Dick was now again steadily swimming forward; and had almost passed the ship, which thus far had been sailing in the contrary direction to him, though for the present her headway had been stopped. He seemed swimming with his utmost velocity, and now only intent upon pursuing his own straight path in the sea.

'Oh! Ahab!' cried Starbuck, 'not too late is it, even now, the third day, to desist. See! Moby Dick seeks thee not. It is thou, thou, that madly seekest him!'

Setting sail to the rising wind, the lonely boat was swiftly impelled to leeward by both oars and canvas. And at last when Ahab was sliding by the vessel, so near as plainly to distinguish Starbuck's face as he leaned over the rail, he hailed him to turn the vessel about, and follow him, not too swiftly, at a judicious interval. Glancing upwards, he saw Tashtego, Queequeg, and Daggo, eagerly mounting to the three mastheads; while the oarsmen were rocking in the two staved boats which had just been hoisted to the side, and were busily at work in repairing them. One after the other, through the port-holes as he sped, he also caught flying glimpses of Stubb and Flask, busying themselves on deck among bundles of new irons and lances. As he saw all this; as he heard the hammers in the broken boats; far other hammers seemed driving a nail into his heart. But he rallied. And now marking that the vane of flag was gone from the main masthead, he shouted to Tashtego, who had just gained that perch, to descend again for another flag, and a hammer and nails, and so nail it to the mast.

Whether fagged by the three days' running chase, and the resistance to his swimming in the knotted hamper he bore; or whether it was some latent deceitfulness and malice in him; whichever was true, the White Whale's way now began to abate, as it seemed from the boat so rapidly nearing him once more; though indeed the whale's last start had not been so long a one as before. And still as Ahab glided over the waves the un pitying sharks accompanied him; and so pertinaciously stuck to the boat; and so continually bit at the plying oars, that the blades became jagged and crunched, and left small splinters in the sea, at almost every dip.

'Heed them not! those teeth but give new rowlocks to your oars. Pull on! 'tis the better rest, the shark's jaw than the yielding water.'

'But at every bite, sir, the thin blades grow smaller and smaller!'

'They will last long enough! Pull on! But who can tell'—he muttered—'whether these sharks swim to feast on a whale or on



Ahab? But pull on! Aye, all alive now—we near him. The helm! take the helm; let me pass,—and so saying, two of the oarsmen helped him forward to the bows of the still flying boat.

At length as the craft was cast to one side, and ran ranging along with the White Whale's flank, he seemed strangely oblivious of its advance—as the whale sometimes will—and Ahab was fairly within smoky mountain mist, which, thrown off from the whale's spout, curled round his great Monadnock hump. He was even thus close to him; when, with body arched back, and both arms lengthwise high-lifted to the poise, he darted his fierce iron, and his far fiercer curse into the hated whale. As both steel and curse sank to the socket, as if sucked into a morass, Moby Dick sideways writhed; spasmodically rolled his nigh flank against the bow and, without staving a hole in it, so suddenly canted the boat over, that had it not been for the elevated part of the gunwale to which he then clung, Ahab would have once more been tossed into the sea. As it was, three of the oarsmen—who foreknew not the precise instant of the dart, and were therefore unprepared for its effects—these were flung out; but so fell, that, in an instant two of them clutched the gunwale again, and rising to its level on a combing wave, hurled themselves bodily in-board again; the third man helplessly drooping astern, but still afloat and swimming.

Almost simultaneously, with a mighty volition of ungraduated instantaneous swiftness, the White Whale darted through the weltering sea. But when Ahab cried out to the steersman to take new turns with the line, and hold it so; and commanded the crew to turn round on their seats, and tow the boat up to the mark; the moment the treacherous line felt that double strain and tug, it snapped in the empty air!

'What breaks in me? Some sinew cracks!—'tis whole again; oars! oars! Burst in upon him!'

Hearing the tremendous rush of the sea-crashing boat, the whale wheeled round to present his blank forehead at bay; but in that evolution, catching sight of the nearing black hull of the ship; seemingly seeing in it the source of all his persecutions; bethinking it—it may be—a larger and nobler foe; of a sudden he bore down upon its advancing prow, smiting his jaws amid fiery showers of foam.

Ahab staggered; his hand smote his forehead. 'I grow blind; hands! stretch out before me that I may yet grope my way. Is't night?'

'The whale! The ship!' cried the clinging oarsmen.

'Oars! oars! Slope downwards to thy depths, O sea, that ere it be for ever too late, Ahab may slide his last, last time upon his mark! I see; the ship! the ship! Dash on, my men! Will ye not save my ship?'

But as the oarsmen violently forced their boat through the sledge-hammering seas, the before whale-smitten bow-ends of two planks burst through, and in an instant almost, the temporarily disabled boat lay nearly level with the waves; its half-wading, splashing crew, trying hard to stop the gap and bale out the pouring water.

Meantime, for that one holding instant, Tashtego's mast-head hammer remained suspended in his hand; and the red flag, half-wrapping him as with a plaid, then streamed itself straight out from him, as his own forward-flowing heart; while Starbuck and Stubb, standing upon the bowsprit beneath, caught sight of the down-coming monster just as soon as he.

'The whale! the whale! Up helm, up helm! Oh, all ye sweet powers of air, now hug me close! Let not Starbuck die, if die he must, in a woman's fainting fit. Up helm, I say—ye fools, the jaw! the jaw! Is this the end of all my bursting prayers? all my life-long fidelities? Oh, Ahab, Ahab, lo, thy work. Steady! helmsman, steady! Nay, nay! Up helm again! He turns to meet us! Oh, his unappeasable brow drives on towards one, whose duty tells him he cannot depart. My God, stand by me now!'

'Stand not by me, but stand under me, whoever you are that will now help Stubb; for Stubb too, sticks here. I grin at thee, thou grinning whale! Whoever helped Stubb, or kept Stubb awake, but Stubb's own unwinking eye? And now poor Stubb goes to bed upon a mattress that is all too soft; would it were stuffed with brushwood. I grin at thee, thou grinning whale! Look ye, moon and stars! I call ye assassins of as good a fellow as ever spouted up his ghost. For all that, I would yet ring glasses with ye, would ye but hand the cup! Oh, oh, oh, oh! thou grinning whale, but there'll be plenty of gulping soon! Why fly ye not, O Ahab? For me, off shoes and jacket to it; let Stubb die in his drawers! A most mouldy and over-salted death, though;—cherries! cherries! cherries! Oh, Flask, for one red cherry ere we die!'

'Cherries? I only wish that we were where they grow. Oh, Stubb, I hope my poor mother's drawn my part-pay ere this; if not, few coppers will come to her now, for the voyage is up.'

From the ship's bows, nearly all the seamen now hung inactive; hammers, bits of plank, lances, and harpoons, mechanically retained in their hands, just as they had darted from their various employments; all their enchanted eyes intent upon the whale, which from side to side strangely vibrating his predestinating head, set a broad band of over-spreading semi-circular foam before him as he rushed. Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect, and spite of all that mortal man could do, the solid white

buttress of his forehead smote the ship's starboard bow, till men and timbers reeled. Some fell flat upon their faces. Like dislodged trucks, the heads of the harpooners aloft shook on their hull-like necks. Through the breach, they heard the waters pour, as mountain torrents down a flume.

'The ship! The hearse!—the second hearse!' cried Ahab from the boat; 'its wood could only be American!'

Diving beneath the settling ship, the Whale ran quivering along its keel, but turning under water, swiftly shot to the surface again, far off the other bow, but within a few yards of Ahab's boat, where, for a time, he lay quiescent.

'I turn my body from the sun. What ho, Tashtego! let me hear thy hammer. Oh! ye three unsundered spires of mine; thou uncracked keel; and only god-bullied hull; thou firm deck, and haughty helm, and Pole-pointed prow—death-glorious ship! must ye then perish, and without me? Am I cut off from the last fond pride of meanest shipwrecked captains? Oh, lonely death on lonely life! Oh, now I feel my topmost greatness lies in my topmost grief. Ho, ho! from all your furthest bounds, pour ye now in, ye bold billows of my whole foregone life, and top this one piled comber of my death! Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale? to the last I grapple with thee? from hell's heart I stab at thee? for hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee. Sink all coffins and all hearses to one common pool! and since neither can be mine let me then tow to pieces, while still chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale! *Thus*, I give up the spear.'

The harpoon was darted; the stricken whale flew forward; with igniting velocity the line ran through the groove; ran foul. Ahab stooped to clear it; he did clear it; but the flying turn caught him round the neck, and voicelessly as Turkish mutes bow-string their victims, he was shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone. Next instant, the heavy eye-splice in the rope's final end flew out of the stark-empty tub, knocked down an oarsman, and smiting the sea, disappeared in its depth.

For an instant, the tranced boat's crew stood still; then turned.

'The ship! Great God, where is the ship?'

Soon they through dim, bewildering mediums saw her sidelong fading phantom, as in the gaseous *Fata Morgana*; only the uppermost masts out of water; while fixed by infatuation or fidelity, or fate, to their once lofty perches, the pagan harpooners still maintained their sinking look-outs on the sea. And now, concentric circles seized the lone boat itself, and all its crew, and each floating oar, and every lance-pole and spinning, animate and inanimate, all

round and round in one vortex, carried the smallest chip of the *Pequod* out of sight.

But as the last whelmings intermixingly poured themselves over the sunken head of the Indian at the mainmast, leaving a few inches of the erect spar yet visible, together with long streaming yards of the flag, which calmly undulated, with ironical coincidings, over the destroying billows they almost touched;—at that instant, a red arm and a hammer hovered backwardly uplifted in the open air, in the act of nailing the flag faster and yet faster to the subsiding spar. A sky-hawk that tauntingly had followed the main-truck downwards from its natural home among the stars, pecking at the flag, and incommoding Tashtego there; this bird now chanced to intercept its broad fluttering wing between the hammer and the wood; and simultaneously feeling that ethereal thrill, the submerged savage beneath, in his death-grasp, kept his hammer frozen there; and so the bird of heaven, with unearthly shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upwards, and his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down with his ship, which, like Satan, would not sink to hell till she had dragged a living part of heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it.

Now small fowls flew screaming over the yet yawning gulf; a sullen white surf beat against its steep sides; then all collapsed, and the great simoom of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago.



# THE ROBINSON CRUSOE OF THE POLAR REGIONS

ANON.

SOMEWHERE about the year 1757, a vessel named the *Anne Forbes* left the port of Aberdeen for the Greenland whale fishery. On board, as a seaman, was a lad of the name of Gordon, who was fated to be the subject of some singular adventures in the Polar regions. The captain's name was Hughes, an Englishman, who had the character of being rash, drunken, and obstinate, and altogether unfit for such a situation. They had instructions to proceed to the Spitzbergen seas; and, accordingly, stretched away to the north-east. They had fine weather and an open sea, save that there was a girdle of ice of from ten to thirty miles broad that belted the whole coast of east Greenland, the mountains of which country were frequently in view. They sailed between that and Iceland, and about the seventieth degree, came frequently in view of some tremendous fish, all of which appeared to be journeying rapidly northward. They captured one, and continued their route straight on for a fortnight, although the mate, an old experienced sailor, represented to the captain, again and again, the danger of penetrating so far into the Polar Seas; but he only laughed at him, and declared that they had reached the Pole, and could sail to China as soon as to Spain. There were plenty of fish, and they loaded the vessel; the captain, however, would not quit the place, but continued exulting and getting intoxicated on the merits of his grand discovery, until the needle lost all power.

For two days the mate kept pointing out to the captain some brilliant appearance at a great distance, which he said he suspected were immense floes or fields of ice, and if the wind should chance to rise in that direction, they should to a certainty be enclosed. But Captain Hughes answered him with the greatest contempt: 'Why, you old grovelling ass, you have not half the science of a sea-horse, nor half the ambition of a lobster. You do not perceive, and cannot estimate, the value of the discovery I have made; a discovery which will hand down my name to all generations, and not only my name, but the very name of the vessel, and every one on board of her will go down to posterity. Therefore, tell me not of your floes and your

fields, your rainbow colours, and cowardly surmises. Am I not resting on the pole of the world, and can run from hence into any of its divisions I choose? I am like a man on the top of a hill, who, if the storm approaches on the one side, can take shelter on the other.'

'Why, it may a' be true that ye say, captain,' said the mate; 'I may hae little science an' less ambition. But I hae as muckle science as to perceive that you are detaining us in a very critical and perilous situation, for no earthly purpose that I can see; and my ambition is all to save the ship and cargo of my employers.'

'Say rather to save your own mean and despicable carcass,' retorted the captain. 'I am answerable to my employers for the ship and cargo, not you. And think you not the value of the discovery I have made, to be of more value than any ship or cargo that ever sailed the ocean?'

'Perhaps it may, captain,' said he, 'that point I shall not dispute with you. But if we lose the ship, we lose ourselves, and the grand discovery into the bargain.'

'There you say true,' returned the captain, 'and it is the first word of sense you have spoken. Come, and let us have one bottle together on the head of it. Who knows what you may yet be. I promise you, that we shall sail southward with the first breeze, and I'll take you half-a-dozen we shall be the first of the whalers on the coast of Scotland.'

The captain then went and intoxicated himself as usual. In a few hours afterwards, from some unaccountable current, the mate perceived the vessel to be drifting with great rapidity, but not knowing in what direction, he called up the captain, who, though quite confounded and confused, instantly ordered all sails to be set. After he had taken the sun's altitude, he commanded the ship to be put about; and sailed in the contrary direction to that in which they had been drifting for the last eight hours. The current was strong against them with a light breeze on the starboard bow. The ice approached on all sides, and what was worst of all, a whitish fog covered them. The captain was now manifestly alarmed, for he kept close on deck, and gave his orders with impatience and surliness.

But in spite of all their efforts, they became completely involved in broken floating ice. They continued, however, to drift slowly toward the south-west, under short sail, passing what the crew took for a huge iceberg, but which the captain said was one of the 'Seven Sisters', off the coast of Spitzbergen. That was the last land they were doomed to see. After struggling on for four-and-twenty hours longer, they perceived a vast and apparently interminable field of ice before them, which, with the floating ice behind, rendered their

situation doubly perilous. Seeing what was likely to be the issue, Gordon ran up to the mast-head. In an instant, crash went the masts and bulwarks of the goodly *Anne Forbes*, like egg-shells. By the concussion, Gordon was thrown from his position, and landed on one of the fields of ice. The whole perished in a moment, except himself, and the ship went down; but in less than half-an-hour, by some extraordinary operations of the iceberg below the water, she was thrown out on the ice, keel uppermost, a perfect wreck!

There, then, was this man left on a field of floating ice, on the great Polar ocean, without food or shelter. He happened to have in his pocket an Old Testament, of very small dimensions, which his mother gave him on his first going to sea. It wanted the prophecies, but had the psalms; and from this he afterwards derived the greatest consolation. He saw at once the necessity of trying to reach the hulk, an attempt which was beset with danger, for the broken ice towered up in heaps, and there were gulfs of considerable extent between them. But life is sweet, and hunger began to assail him so he determined to try. It is impossible to describe the perils he underwent in this attempt: for, when climbing over mountains of ice as firm as rocks, he came to other parts which had little more consistency than froth, and there he slumped over head and ears into the sea. But the sea was so compressed by the weight of the ice, that it always threw him up again fairly above it. The ice was so slippery at times, that he could get no hold, and he knew that, if he sank among the soft ice into the water gradually, he was gone: therefore, when he found that he was going, he jumped in, and then he was sure to come up again with a spring. At length, when beginning to despair, he reached a splinter of a boatmast, and then he proceeded with safety, though perishing with cold, hunger, and fatigue.

When at last he did reach the wreck, he could obtain no entrance, as the keel was uppermost, and all the other parts jammed in among the ice. Besides, he was completely exhausted, and had nothing to dig with, save the splinter of the mast. The hulk, as far as above the ice, seemed nearly complete and unbroken, but he could get no opening within. Perceiving a number of things scattered here and there at a little distance, by the aid of his splinter, he made towards them in hopes of finding something to allay his thirst, which he suffered far more from than from hunger, for all the ice which he tasted was salt. He found nothing save scraps of sails, cables, boats, and things that had been smashed on deck when the collision with the ice took place; but when nearly exhausted, he perceived, not far from him, beyond a level plain of ice, a tremendous iceberg, which he took for a mountain; and on hastening towards it as



well as he could, he found, to his great joy, that the ice of which it was composed was fresh. This was an unexpected relief, and he knelt and blessed his kind Maker and preserver for it; and committing himself to His mercy and protection, he sucked till he could hold no more.

His strength was now renewed, and his thirst somewhat allayed; but the throes of hunger were increased. He went once more to the wreck, to search for something to eat. Among other things, he found a small boat-hook used for the yawl, and a harpoon fastened to a part of the shattered long-boat. Returning to the hulk, he, with the boat-hook, with difficulty cleared away the ice astern, and was thus enabled to reach the cabin-window, by which he entered, but found it full of ice, and every thing turned upside down. He made his way to the bread-locker, which, being inverted, he broke up at the bottom and found it crammed full of biscuits. Although they were steeped in salt-water, he thought he had never tasted any thing so delicious, so he ate until he grew as thirsty as ever, but continued clearing away the rubbish from the cabin, and on reaching the captain's secret store-closet, he broke it open in hopes of getting something stronger than ice-water to drink; but the bottles were all overturned and smashed, at which he was exceedingly grieved and disappointed. He got knives and forks, however, a cork-screw, and many other things that would have been of great use, had he any use for them. At length, below all the rubbish, he came upon a whole cask of spirits unpierced, and certainly never man made a more joyful discovery, not even his late captain when he absurdly supposed that he had discovered the North Pole. The cork-screw was instantly applied, out flew the bung, and down went his nose to the hole. It was either rum or brandy—he believed it was a mixture of the two—and taking the tube of the old ship bellows, he put in the wide end, and sucked the small one. The liquor came liberally; but he was little aware of its potency. Having never drunk anything so good before, and his stomach and whole frame being out of order, he was of course soon overcome, grew dizzy, and fell down beside the cask, where, after one or two ineffectual efforts to rise, he soon fell asleep.

He slept for a considerable time, and on awaking he found himself so benumbed as to be unable to rise. He, therefore, had recourse again and again to the contents of the barrel, of which he supplied himself liberally. At length he conceived that he heard a great number of people busily engaged, and muttering round the vessel. Rendered weak by the hardships he had endured, and quite disorganised by the quantity of liquor he had drunk, he became very much alarmed, and quite confused in his ideas; and when he heard,

as he thought, somebody enter the cabin at the hole which he had made astern, and soon after begin munching at the biscuits, he was overcome with terror. Being impelled, however, by an irresistible curiosity to know what sort of person it was that thus broke in upon his privacy, he arose and cautiously opened the door of the closet where he had been all the time, and saw what he supposed was a naked woman, escaping from the cabin window. He was sure, at any rate, that he saw her bare feet and toes. This, in the middle of the frozen ocean, was altogether unaccountable; but he seized his boat-hook in one hand, and a harpoon in the other, and went cautiously to the entrance hole. Judge of his feelings on perceiving a whole herd of white Polar bears, prowling round the ship, and all busy digging and eating! It was amazing what holes these powerful persevering monsters had dug in the ice, and were preying on the fish that had been in the ship, and on the bodies of Gordon's late companions. There were two bears within twelve yards of him, tearing and grubbing at the body of his late captain, which he knew to be his from the shreds and patches of his clothes that were strewed about, and a part of his deck-hat, such as was worn by English coasters—and there was the end of his grand discovery!

Not knowing what experiment to fall upon to drive this herd of monsters away, Gordon took a speaking-trumpet and shouted through it with all his might, 'Avast, ye lubbers!' on which they all sprung up on their hind feet, standing as straight as human creatures. They were all sleek, fat, and plump, and some of them stood at least ten feet high. After staring about them for a time, they again fell to munching their grateful repast. He endeavoured, with various kinds of sounds, to frighten them; but instead of flying, they began to collect together, and draw nearer to him. He was, therefore, obliged to barricade his only place of entrance, putting the fire-grate into it. He then took all the knives and forks he could get, and every sharp instrument, and tied them to the bars with oakum, putting their sharp points outward. Conceiving himself in perfect safety, he retired to the closet, swallowed a tankard of brandy, and taking the blankets from off the cabin beds, which were hard frozen, he made himself a couch, and locking the door on the inside, he, like other Polar animals, once more betook himself to a state of torpidity.

He did not, however, forget his religious duties, and often prayed to Him who had hitherto been his preserver, and whose arm, though strong to smite, is also strong to save. When he sung a psalm, which he generally did before retiring to his cheerless bed, the white bears gathered round the hulk of the vessel to listen; and when he looked

out, he was sometimes amused with their strange gambols on the occasion.

The nights were now setting in, and the bears prowling all about, though rather in a more listless manner, as if gorged. He ate a good deal of salt biscuit, and could reach plenty of hoar frost, which lay nearly two inches thick, to allay his thirst. To warm him, however, and arouse his energies, he had recourse, ever and anon, to the brandy, which generally set him sleeping for twenty-four hours, and sometimes more, at a time.

He was now quite sure, from the invasion of the bears, that there was a communication with some country—most probably Spitzbergen. He imagined he was somewhere about the middle of the sea, between Greenland and the North Cape; and as there was plenty of spirits, and provisions of all kinds within the hulk, if he could get at them, he more than half made up his mind to attempt wintering on the ice: but to do this, he required to work his way both into the hold and the forecastle, at whatever labour, where he knew there were coals and stores of various sorts. To add to his difficulties, however, every thing was reversed, and the companion-door down among the ice. This he judged it necessary to gain, and then work his way between the deck and the solid ice below, and many a hard day's labour he spent in vain on this; for when at length he arrived at the valve of the hold, he found the whole weight of the cargo tumbled over and lying above it, so that to open it was not only impossible, but, if it had been practicable, would have been attended with certain suffocation to himself. In the course of his excavations, however, he found the captain's wardrobe, consisting of plenty of shirts and clothes; but all steeped with salt water, and frozen. He also found his shaving utensils, and his flint and materials for lighting his pipe. He reached, likewise, the coal-hole, behind the flue, containing a few coals, and an old axe for breaking them. From among the rubbish of a boat that had been fastened on deck, he groped out a square-sail and some smaller ones, besides possessing himself of a good hatchet and many other useful things.

Fire was now the only thing he wanted for melting the ice, for cooking, and for drying his clothes; yet although he had the materials, without a smoke-vent he could not use them. But, after trying various experiments, he at length succeeded in carrying a flue up to the heel of the keel, and found it to answer admirably.

Winter had now fairly set in. The calls of the swans and geese, journeying southward, no more reached his ears. A few bears were occasionally prowling about; but he seldom went outside. As he had now found a use for the grate, he stuffed up the entrance with a

quantity of snow, through which he had fixed a piece of cable, with which he could push it out, or draw it in, as suited his convenience.

During one of the terrible storms of wind and snow-drift common in the Polar regions, about the middle of the night, Gordon was awakened by some noise inside his cabin. He was frightened beyond measure, for he had no conception what it could be. By-and-bye, something came to his closet-door, and rapped. He held his breath, for he was unable to speak for terror. It tried to wrench open the door, but it failed. He was by this time on his feet, with a large carving-knife in his hand, as sharp as a lance in the point, which he kept always beside him. Presently, he heard the intruder go away, and attack the biscuits. He now knew that it was his first visitor the bear, and was sure that it had come to steal for its winter store. He instantly struck a light, flung open the door, and bolted out, having the light in his left hand, and the long sharp carving-knife, for cutting up beef, whales &c., in his right. The light frightened the creature so dreadfully, that it dashed out at the window with precipitancy; and not taking leisure to put out its fore feet first, along with its head, it stuck fast, and could not move. He ran forward, and with his long knife gave the animal two deadly stabs below the fifth rib, towards the heart. The blood that gushed out, nearly filled the cabin, and the poor brute very soon gave over struggling.

He left the huge animal sticking in the hole, to keep out the cold, and retired to his couch, locking and bolting his closet-door. He could not sleep, however, so rising and taking a dram to warm and cheer him, he went to examine his prey. It was stiff, and beginning to freeze in the flank; yet strange to say, he fancied that he heard it munching the biscuits outside, and making a sort of grumbling noise over them. This again frightened him but resolving to see if the monstrous animal was yet alive, he pulled it into the cabin, and found it quite dead, and its tongue hanging out at the mouth, hard frozen.

The animal was a huge she-bear, with milk in her dugs, which had manifestly been recently sucked. He skinned it with great difficulty, clipped it into neat square pieces, and spread it on the ice, below the inverted decks, to freeze. He calculated that he could not have less than a hundred weight of good wholesome fresh meat. He then cleared out his cabin, washing it all with hot water, and spread the bear's skin on it for a carpet. After swallowing hot punch, he once more retired to bed.

On awaking, he heard a noise at the window, and instantly recognised the sounds which had alarmed him before, when the dead bear was sticking there. It was a sort of plaintive grumbling. Without

hesitation, he opened the window. A bear cub, just apparently dying of hunger and cold, raised its fore feet to the window, as if entreating to be taken in. He helped it in, and when it found its mother's skin, it uttered a bleat of joy, and the tears actually streamed from its eyes. It went round and round, and licked the skin for very fondness; but, alas! it was always looking for what it could not get, the mother's exhausted dug.

At length it seemed to comprehend something of the matter, that a rueful change had taken place; for, after long pauses of stupid consideration, its mutters of joy gradually changed into moanings of heart-rending pathos, and at last it laid itself down in a round form, to die contented, beside all that remained of its mother. Pitying its groans, Gordon proffered it some biscuit. It received the first piece shyly and timorously, but the rest it ate so voraciously, that he was afraid it would choke.

Recollecting with joy that on the ice which he had cleared below the deck of the hold, there were huge heaps of frozen blubber lying, he crept away, with his old coal-axe and a light, and brought some large pieces of frozen blubber, which he broke into small bits, and fed the cub with them, patting it every time, and speaking kindly to it, calling it Nancy, after the only girl he ever loved, for it was a female. It licked his hand in return, and his heart bounded with delight. Their friendship was formed at that moment, with a resolution on his part that it should never be broken.

He fed it slowly, but liberally, and when he judged that it had got enough, he put the remainder of the blubber away out of his reach, and sat down beside it, fondling it, and repeating its name, 'Poor Nancy, poor Nancy!' She licked his hand again, and then rolling herself up once more on her mother's skin, after a few occasional heavy moans, she fell sound asleep.

Out of this sleep she did not awake for at least three days. In the meantime our hero was not idle. In the floor of the fore-castle there was a trap-door, communicating with the bilge water, into which the crew had emptied foul water without being obliged to run up to the ship's side every instant. There was likewise one in the cabin, but that being carpeted was seldom opened. The floor, it will be remembered, was now his ceiling, and on pushing aside the latch of the trap-door above, which he easily effected with a table-knife, the door fell towards him, and hung by the hinges. On entering this hatch-hole, he found himself at the keel of the vessel, among the pig-iron, which, having fallen downward, he had a free passage, first, into the hold—where he found abundance of coals and casks of fresh water, or rather of fresh ice, and the carcasses of five or six whales, so

that he had meat for the bear-cub, Nancy, for five years to come, besides plenty of blubber to burn—and then into the fore-castle, in the larder of which he found a large barrell half-full of beef, and another more than half-full of pork; also bacon, mutton, and deer hams, and about half a cask of Highland whiskey.

He returned rejoicing to the cabin, taking a good piece of solid fish with him, with pipes, snuff, and tobacco, all of which he found nicely packed up in boxes. He tried to awaken Nancy but in vain, and it was only by holding burning tobacco to her nose, which made her sneeze violently, that she could be prevailed upon to open her eyes. He fed her, and her eyes lighted up; he carried her into his closet, closing the door; but she would not settle nor rest from the skin of her mother; which at last he took, and spread above his blankets, when she went of herself and lay down upon it, uttering the same kind of sounds as before.

He taught her by degrees, to follow him in and out. She was never weary of rolling among the snow; and often scraped bitterly at the ice, as if longing to get into the sea. But as she now lay in his bed, he did not encourage this propensity, especially as she continued to thrive, and was soon as plump as a calf. She never once showed the least disposition towards surliness; but seemed to consider Gordon a friend of her own species. She answered to her name, and came at his bidding. And when they walked out upon the ice, he, dressed in his late captain's holiday-clothes, took her paw within his arm, and taught her to walk upright. He often laughed heartily at the figure they cut; and as she tried to imitate him in everything, so she did in laughing; but her laugh was perfectly irresistible, with the half-closed eye, the grin, and the neigh.

The sun at length made his appearance above the southern horizon; and Gordon employed himself, daily, in cutting out a regular stair to the top of the iceberg, in order to make what discoveries he could. This he was not long in effecting, and found it a huge mountain of solid ice, very irregular in its form, having creeks and ravines innumerable.

At length the swans came north over his head, shouting day and night. This, he thought, boded bad things for him; for it told plainly that the Polar Seas, beyond this great field of ice, were open. He therefore judged, that if the ice broke up, he was sure to be carried northward, among unknown seas and frozen coasts. To prevent a catastrophe of this kind, he was more than half determined to set out in search of some country; but he knew not where to go, or where to find either continent or island. He had still plenty of victuals. He had a fowling-piece, and had contrived to dry a box of

gunpowder. He climbed the iceberg almost every day, and at length formed the resolution of digging a cavern in it; as it was impossible, he thought, that it could melt or sink. He made several neat apartments, and one with a chimney, which he formed with great labour with a bar of pig-iron. Here he carried, with great toil, a part of his provisions, spirits, &c., and he resolved, if he saw the ice breaking up, to trust himself on the iceberg as his best resource, and leave the rest to Providence, believing that he would be perfectly secure in it from any danger but starvation.

For about two months, he spent all his waking hours on the top of this romantic mountain, with Nancy, for she was constant to him as his shadow. One morning, which he supposed, from the height and the heat of the sun, was about midsummer, on going to the top of the ice-mountain, and looking round, he saw that the whole sea to the northward was clear of ice to within a mile of them, while there was at the same time a strong current running in that direction. Everything remained as usual for several days longer, only Gordon and his companion slept in one of the chambers he had cut in the iceberg.

One night he was awakened from a sound sleep, by the tottering motion of the iceberg. The motion ceased in the course of a minute, by which time he was up and out on the platform at the top, from whence he saw that the iceberg had moved a small degree round to the west. It had separated from the interminable field of ice on the east, leaving an opening there about a bowsprit over. As the wreck remained on his side of the opening, he hastened down from the mountain to see how matters stood. The sea in the opening was as bright as a mirror, and as soon as Nancy saw the water, she rushed into it, and vanished in below the ice for a space that frightened him for her safety. She at length appeared with a fish in her mouth, something like a large herring. He was glad of it, and caressed her, and away she flew again to the opening. Whenever she dived, she brought up a fish of some sort; and every day thereafter she kept him well supplied with fish, so that he had a treasure of great value in that singular animal.

Perceiving the strong foundation on which the wreck rested, he again slept in his old berth in the closet of the cabin, and one morning when he arose, the beautiful crystal gap of water was gone, and they had set off on another Polar voyage, and left the interminable field of ice behind; and as far as the eye could reach, all was again sea, nothing but sea.

On the ledges of this ice-mountain, the uncouth and lazy walruses were frequently seen resting and rolling themselves, and the seals

would have congregated on it, had it not been for Nancy, between whom and them a perpetual and bloody warfare was carried on.

During the space of six months, at least, Gordon must have traversed these Polar Seas, without ever knowing where he was. He several times saw mountains in the early part of his tour, and twice, in particular, quite distinctly; and once he saw a headland or island straight before him. He was all anxiety to see what kind of country it was, and was on the topmost point of the iceberg on the watch. He was even so near it, that he saw a being whom he took for a woman, moving about on the shore, staring at the floating ice-mountain. He put his two hands to his mouth in place of a speaking trumpet, and hailed the stranger with his whole strength of lungs; but ere he could prevent it, Nancy did the same, and sent forth such a bray that fairly frightened the native, who fled with the swiftness of the roe, and vanished among the rocks. The iceberg, with the ledge of ice attached, having the hulk of the *Anne Forbes* resting on it, after this got into different currents, and was driven about from one direction to another, in that vast Polar sea.

At length the fogs began to brew over the face of the ocean, the sun to near towards the horizon, and from that time forth he saw no more around him, sun, moon, or stars, but journeyed on he knew not whither. Unless when employed cleaning and laying by the fish which Nancy caught, Gordon either lay and dozed, read his Bible, which he got mostly by heart, or amused himself with the gambols and antics of his companion. Though he often slept in his ice-cave in summer, he drew into his old cabin as winter approached, for his ante-room at the cavern had been all melted away during the summer months.

The next change he met with was the hearing of a great rushing noise like a tempest, which continued for some time, although he could conceive no alteration of the ocean. He resolved to walk round the vast mountain of ice, as far as he could get. By the time he got half-way round, the mystery was cleared up. The new ice had commenced, and a strong undercurrent bearing this irresistible mass with its broad base previously on it, it was breaking it up with tremendous violence. The ice, continuing to be rolled up before the mountain, was heaped up before it to such a height, that it at length became once more immovably fixed, and all the turmoil was still.

An intense frost now set in, the fog cleared away, the stars appeared in the zenith, and a beautiful twilight sky fringed the horizon. Gordon was on top of the mountain, looking all around, and persuaded himself that he saw land right ahead, and at no great distance. Whilst contemplating the scene with the greatest interest and



anxiety, judge of his feelings, when the report of a gun reached his ears. He took it for a signal gun from some ship, but what it was, or whence it came, he never discovered. It sounded as if not two miles off. He hastened from the height, seized his fowling-piece, and again ascending the height, fired. After his third shot the salutation was returned with a roar louder than before. He tried as well as he could to imitate the signal of distress, but judging that there was no time to be lost, after his first signal had been answered, he hastened down once more, packed up some powder and shot, victuals, and a bottle of spirits, and posted off in the direction whence he deemed the sound proceeded, and the land lay. Before he went away, he lighted the lamp in the cavern, which he knew would burn for a long time.

When he had travelled from sixteen to twenty miles, calculating from the length of time he had taken, and the fatigue he felt, and while making for some hills which he thought he discovered before him, he perceived Nancy a great way to the right, seeming greatly interested about something, as if following a track. He turned in the same direction, and to his joyful astonishment, found the traces of a company mounting to from thirty or forty individuals, all journeying on the same path, straight for the land. Thus encouraged, he posted on for many miles. At length he came upon some marks which were rather equivocal. Nancy had run off and left him on the track; and now straining his sight forward, he perceived on a rising ground that must have been a shore, a whole herd of white bears, all turned with their faces towards him!

He durst not run for fear of being pursued by the whole herd, and torn to pieces; and as he dared not advance, he squatted down on the ice, and wished himself under it. The monsters, however, had discovered him, and off they all came in a body towards him. He sprang to his feet and ran, without looking behind him. A certain noise, however, which he soon heard coming nearer and nearer, compelled him to look over his shoulder, when he perceived two bears in close pursuit. He flung his wallet of provisions, and his remaining bottle of rum from him, and held on, having then nothing but his loaded gun and his long dirk. The two bears paused when they came to his wallet, and soon devoured the victuals. To his joy, he perceived that the lesser bear was Nancy. Being quite outspent with running, he paused to gather breath, and look at the two. The large wild monster took up the bottle of rum, smelled it, and turned it over, when Nancy, with perfect sang froid, snatched it from him, drew the cork with her teeth, and putting the bottle to her mouth, took apparently a long pull of the spirits, and then

handed it to her companion. He took the bottle, put it to his mouth, and, as Gordon thought, drank about the half of it. He then held up his nose at an angle of forty five, shot out his long red tongue, and licked his chops; he seemed both delighted and astonished, and would not part with the bottle again; but wheeling himself round, with his back to Nancy, he took another pull, till he finished it; and then threw the empty bottle away in a rage, because it would not produce any more. He then fell a dancing and bobbing on his hams, nodding his head from side to side, and cutting capers innumerable; while Nancy stood straight up on her hind feet, and waltzed around him. At last, he tumbled over at full length, and after several ineffectual efforts to rise, he groaned, stretched out his limbs, and lay as if dead.

Gordon had fled with such precipitancy, that he had lost all traces of his path. After travelling several miles, Nancy quitted him, and, as he thought, returned to kill the sleeping monster he had left behind. He was hungry and thirsty, and overcome with sleep and fatigue; he had lost his only guide, yet still he was hurrying on he knew not where. He knelt on the snow-covered ice, and prayed to God to direct and save him. He rose, strengthened and revived, and shortly afterwards, to his great gladness, he came upon his own backward track.

He now hied on with cheerfulness, but he became exceedingly fatigued, and sleep quite overcame him; and though he knew that to lie down on the ice was death, he felt an irresistible inclination to do it. When he felt himself drooping, he rested on his knees, and leant his head and arm on the muzzle of the gun, and thus obtained some momentary sleep; and when he was getting sound asleep from the effects of the frost, he fell over, which awakened him.

He proceeded in this way for some time; but at length he heard a noise coming along the ice, like the galloping of horses, accompanied occasionally with a growling murmur. He made all the haste he could, but his strength was gone. On looking back, he beheld a bear coming upon him at full speed. It was soon kneeling at his feet, and licking his hand. It was Nancy, bleeding. She instantly turned about, and went slowly back. He then perceived a gigantic bear, standing on end, like a tall obelisk, covered with snow. His heart fainted within him; but he cocked his gun, and tried to run on. Nancy endeavoured to oppose the monster by throwing herself always in before him; but he would not bite or tear her; he only gave her a cuff with his paw, to make her keep out of his way. Gordon tried several times to take aim at him, but found it impossible without shooting Nancy; so that all he could do was to run on, until, fairly exhausted, he fell flat on his face. Instantly he found himself grasped, and one

of the bears above him. It was poor Nancy trying to cover him with her own body from the attacks of the savage brute that pursued him. The monster struggled to reach his neck, and forced his head in below Nancy, and Gordon felt first his cold nose, and then his warm lips close to his throat. He called out, "Seize him!" the words he used for baiting on Nancy, and which she always promptly obeyed, on which she gave him such a snap, that not only made him desist, but growl like a bull.

The huge animal, although thus foiled, at length made his attack at the same point again, and in trying to reach Gordon's neck, he seized him by the left arm, close below the shoulder. He called out furiously for Nancy, who at that moment seized the gigantic monster by the throat with her teeth and paws. He started away and swung her round and round, like a baby, bellowing fearfully; but quit her gripe Nancy would not. He then seized her with his paws, hugged her, and threw her down, but would not tear her. With all speed and precision his wounded arm would admit of, Gordon held the muzzle of his gun to the larger bear's ear, and fired. The shot took away the power of doing any hurt with his mouth; but his paws continued to embrace Nancy with a deadly grasp, she still keeping a fast hold of his throat. He then stabbed him to the heart again and again; and though the blood streamed through the snow as if a sluice had been opened, it was amazing how tenacious the monster was of life. But at length he slackened his hold, and rolled over and over on the ice. As soon as Nancy got free, he embraced her, and feeble and overworn almost to death, with her at his side to lean upon, they made their escape to the old hulk.

He barricaded the entrance window, fed Nancy, ate something himself, drank a little brandy, knelt down and returned thanks to the Almighty for his deliverance, and having kindled a fire of coal and driftwood, and bathed and dressed his arm, which was much lacerated, and washed Nancy all over, he took a short and troubled sleep. As for Nancy, with the late exertion and a hearty meal, she fell into the torpid state, and dozed away the time for nearly three months, until he was obliged forcibly to awaken her, as he had done before.

It proved a severe winter, much stormier than the last; and by the time the sun began to show his disc above the horizon, our modern Crusoe had once more resolved to make a pilgrimage over the ice, in search of some inhabited country. Accordingly he made the requisite preparations, and loaded himself and Nancy very heavily, knowing that his loads would constantly be getting lighter, and then he left his old comfortable cabin, and his mountain of ice,

with many bitter tears, all uncertain whether he should ever see it again.

Away they jogged together, holding their course, as nearly as Gordon could guess, to the S.S.W. The mountains towards which he had journeyed before were quite visible; but he called that land the Bear Island, and believing it to be inhabited by a whole colony of bears, he did not venture near it; but turning to the left, he passed it in the space of three days. Having reached the south-west corner of this country, he unexpectedly came upon the traces of three men and a number of dogs, and by following them, he arrived, in a few hours, at the shore. There he found a spot where the men had evidently rested, and his heart bounded with joy. In order to overtake them, it was necessary to leave the luggage, or the greater part of it; so, making with strong cord a muzzle for Nancy, who was an indiscriminate destroyer, and would certainly attack the dogs first, and in all probability the men next, and taking a bottle of Highland whiskey and some provisions with him, he set out on the track of the three men, and followed most eagerly. Having fastened the muzzle on Nancy, he put a cord to it, and led her. She tried to get loose by pulling the muzzle off with her paws; but his commands restrained her, although she continued to look at him with apparent astonishment and dejection.

After he had travelled about fourteen hours, he came to a place where the three men had evidently rested and refreshed themselves; and there was a great deal of blood upon the snow, from which he concluded they were hunters, and had killed some game. Here he took some refreshment, there being a spring gushing out of a rock, and likewise fed Nancy, who began scraping on a spot between two rocks, where he soon discovered a store of venison, covered over with snow, and trampled firm down. From this he perceived that this spring was the rendezvous of the hunters; and to meet with them he had only to remain where he was. With what anxiety of heart did he pass these few hours!

His suspense was at length relieved by the approach of six strong dogs coming all up hill, baying upon him in the most furious manner possible. An expedient struck him in a moment. He drew his coat tails over his head, stooped, and ran forward to meet them. After uttering a few short barks of terror, they all fled, as if the devil had been chasing them. The astonishment and dismay of their masters may well be conceived, when they met their dauntless assistants retreating with looks of such wild dismay. Peeping through the cleft of his coat, he perceived masters and dogs flying amain, the latter leading the way, barking in downright terror. He instantly assumed

his natural shape, and hallooed after them. They turned round, gaping and staring, but did not stop. The sight of a human creature coming on them in the company of a wild bear, the only creature of which they stood in perpetual dread, was too much for their comprehension; so they took to their heels, and Gordon had no other shift than to pursue.

Their snow-shoes, however, kept them above the snow, whereas every step that he took he sank at least half a foot, the surface being thawed on all the south sides of the hills. He was, therefore, obliged to give up the pursuit and return. Assured that they would come back to that place, if not through hunger, at least for the fruits of their labour, he hid himself among some rocks hard by, from which the sun had melted the snow.

He soon fell asleep from fatigue and anxiety; and was awakened by Nancy struggling to get free. Hearing people speaking, he peeped over the rock, and saw the three men standing beside their buried treasure, in earnest conversation, and apparently astonished at finding all their store untouched. Gordon drew himself up to the verge of the cliff, and, at once, on his knees, implored them, for Jesus Christ's sake, to take him under their protection. They knew the name, and each of them took off his fur cap, and knelt on his right knee; but when Nancy appeared on the cliff, the dogs scampered off. The men were about to follow, on which he held up the cord to show them that she was muzzled and chained; and ordering her, she cowered at his feet, and kissed his hand. This astonished the men, who stared at one another, and Gordon explained to them his situation as best he could, for they did not understand one another's language. He then took out his whiskey bottle, and gave them all a tasting, which pleased them not a little.

They were now friends, and sat down to eat together. They then packed up for departure, the men having secured as much food as they could convey, although they took care to carry no bones. They gave the dogs those for their share, after have sliced the flesh neatly off them, which they stuffed into sealskin bags, and then yoking the dogs to these in pairs, they trailed them with great swiftness over the snow. Being apprehensive of a row between the dogs and Nancy, Gordon made signs for the men to muzzle the dogs, which they did, and then they journeyed together in peace. When they came to his luggage, the sun being warm, they rested long, and slept; and the men let him understand that they had to provide for a long journey. After proceeding three days and three nights along the level surface of the ice, they beheld the open sea, and came to two canoes, and a boat, lying on the ice, near to the verge of the sea. The boat was for

carrying the dogs and one man, and the canoes for a man each. As the dogs were perfectly obedient, each of the men took two dogs below the leather of his canoe, and Gordon was deposited in the bottom of the small boat, and there, with Nancy beside him, he was forbid to move, for fear of oversetting the frail bark.

They at length arrived on another coast, and were met upon the shore by twelve young women; who conducted him to their habitation, and at the entrance they were received by an old man, with hair and beard as white as the driven snow. He was the patriarch of the little colony, and their priest; and Gordon was instructed to kneel and receive his blessing, which he did, and was then conducted in, and welcomed with many tokens of veneration.

The home of these simple people was strangely constructed. The outer apartments were built and vaulted with snow; but, besides these, there was a long natural cavern stretching under the rocks, and many irregular recesses; in one of which his bed was made, which was a good one, and there he and Nancy were left to their repose.

The colony consisted of thirty-one women and ten men, including the aged father—the rest of the men had perished at sea, or in bear-hunting—and seven children, two of whom only were boys. Gordon ascertained that he was in Old Greenland, among a remnant of a colony of Norwegians, a race of simple primitive Christians, whose progenitors had occupied that inclement shore for centuries; and once, by their own account, amounted to many thousands; but, strange to say, fell by degrees a prey to the irresistible invasions of the great Polar bears. They had a prophecy among them that the bears were one day to devour the last of them. The people were of low stature, and their fur dresses made them appear as square creatures, very near as broad as long.

Here Gordon lived for a considerable time. He married one of the women, and owing to the depressed state of the colony, was allowed two others as concubines, that they might have the chance of producing boys. This was a state of matters not at all likely to please Nancy, who would not leave his apartment while he slept, nor allow another to lie in his arms in her presence. She had soon become a favourite with the whole tribe, owing to her expertness in fishing; and accompanied them in an expedition which they made to the hulk of the *Anne Forbes*, to bring away some part of the oil, spirits, iron, &c., which had been left there, on which occasion they took with them eight light sledges, drawn by one-and-thirty powerful dogs, the whole conducted by four men, of which number Gordon was one, while poor Nancy travelled on foot.

After their return, Nancy evinced such strong symptoms of jealousy as alarmed her master very much. When the poor creature found that she was debarred from sleeping by him, and watching over him in the night, her unhappiness was extreme. Her moans disturbed the whole community; and so, after she had spent the part of one night in such groans, as if her very heart was breaking, in the morning she was missing, and, though they searched for her far and near, she was nowhere to be found.

A considerable time passed on; but, at last, on rising one morning, they found themselves invaded by a horde of white bears, and the ice-roof of their cavern penetrated in two places. The colony at the time consisted of about sixty men, women, and children; but only one-third of these were capable of standing any deadly struggle. They resisted, however, the attacks of their ferocious assailants, in the best manner they were able. They had plenty of spears, both of bone and iron, some bows, and arrows in abundance; but of powder and lead they had only a few charges remaining. They sallied on the bears, not only every one who could bear arms, but every one who could carry a red clout for a flag, at which colour the bears are said to be frightened—with all their dogs and all their shells. The bears fled before the deafening noise; they pursued, but were attacked by a powerful body in the rear, and turning to defend themselves, they were again instantly attacked by those they had been chasing. The slaughter committed by the bears was dreadful. In the midst of the strife, Gordon was seized by an immense powerful bear, round the arms and the breast, and borne off with great rapidity. The huge animal never stopped until it brought him to the door of their now nearly desolate habitation, where it set him down uninjured, kneeled at his feet, and kissed his hands. To his astonishment and joy, he found that it was his long-lost Nancy. He embraced her, and was now sure of protection.

The generous animal, on the approach of some equivocal sounds, seized him by his dress, and drew him into one of the recesses of the cavern, where she took his sealskin wallet and laid it on her back. He then knew that she wanted him to load her with provisions and fly, which he effected with all speed. They issued from the cavern with great caution, and she led him straight to the sea-side, to the very spot at which they had first landed in Greenland, and there she threw his load from her back, kneeled, licked his hand, and then scampered off to share the prey with her associates.

There were plenty of canoes lying at the spot, and some fishing-boats; but choosing the best canoe he could find, he stowed his victuals in about his feet and legs, bound a sealskin cover around

his breast, and set out to sea. He continued his voyage night and day, along a weather shore, going on land occasionally to sleep. He got some distant views of Iceland, but could not get near it for ice; so he held on his course until fairly hemmed in with ice; he then drew his canoe ashore, and climbed a hill, from which he saw the open sea at no great distance, and several ships, all apparently beating southward. He posted on, running without intermission in the direction of the ships; but before he reached the verge of the ice, they were all gone beyond hail. To his great joy, however, after spending twelve hours in the utmost anxiety, the *Briel*, of Amsterdam, hove in view, beating up, and as in one of her tacks she came close to him, he was taken on board, and once more safely landed in Scotland, after an absence of seven years.





# THE BRUTE

BY JOSEPH CONRAD

**D**ODGING in from the rain-swept street, I exchanged a smile and a glance with Miss Blank in the bar of the Three Crows. This exchange was effected with extreme propriety. It is a shock to think that, if still alive, Miss Blank must be something over sixty now. How time passes!

Noticing my gaze directed inquiringly at the partition of glass and varnished wood, Miss Blank was good enough to say, encouragingly:

'Only Mr. Jermyn and Mr. Stonor in the parlour with another gentleman I've never seen before.'

I moved towards the parlour door. A voice discoursing on the other side (it was but a matchboard partition) rose so loudly that the concluding words became quite plain in all their atrocity.

'That fellow Wilmot fairly dashed her brains out, and a good job, too!'

This inhuman sentiment, since there was nothing profane or improper in it, failed to do as much as to check the slight yawn Miss Blank was achieving behind her hand. And she remained gazing fixedly at the window-panes, which streamed with rain.

As I opened the parlour door the same voice went on in the same cruel strain:

'I was glad when I heard she got the knock from somebody at last. Sorry enough for poor Wilmot, though. That man and I used to be chums at one time. Of course that was the end of him. A clear case of there ever was one. No way out of it. None at all.'

The voice belonged to the gentleman Miss Blank had never seen before. He straddled his long legs on the hearthrug. Jermyn, leaning forward, held his pocket-handkerchief spread out before the grate. He looked back dismally over his shoulder, and as I slipped behind one of the little wooden tables, I nodded to him. On the other side of the fire, imposingly calm and large, sat Mr. Stonor, jammed tight into a capacious Windsor armchair. There was nothing small about him but his short, white side-whiskers. Yards and yards of extra superfine blue cloth (made up into an overcoat) reposed on a chair

by his side. And he must just have brought some liner from sea, because another chair was smothered under his black waterproof, ample as a pall, and made of a three-fold oiled silk, double-stitched throughout. A man's hand-bag of the usual size looked like a child's toy on the floor near his feet.

I did not nod to him. He was too big to be nodded to in that parlour. He was a senior Trinity pilot, and condescended to take his turn in the cutter only during the summer months. He had been many times in charge of royal yachts in and out of Port Victoria. Besides, it's no use nodding to a monument. And he was like one. He didn't speak, he didn't budge. He just sat there, holding his handsome old head up, immovable, and almost bigger than life. He was extremely fine. Mr. Stonor's presence reduced poor old Jermyn to a mere shabby wisp of a man, and made the talkative stranger in tweeds on the hearthrug look absurdly boyish. The latter must have been a few years over thirty, and was certainly not the sort of individual that gets abashed at the sound of his own voice, because gathering me in, as it were, by a friendly glance, he kept it going without a check.

'I was glad of it,' he repeated, emphatically. 'You may be surprised at it, but then you haven't gone through the experience I've had of her. I can tell you, it was something to remember. Of course, I got off scot free myself—as you can see. She did her best to break up my pluck for me tho'. She jolly near drove as fine a fellow as ever lived into a madhouse. What do you say to that—eh?'

Not an eyelid twitched in Mr. Stonor's enormous face. Monumental! The speaker looked straight into my eyes.

'It used to make me sick to think of her going about the world murdering people.'

Jermyn approached the handkerchief a little nearer to the grate and groaned. It was simply a habit he had.

'I've seen her once,' he declared, with a mournful indifference. 'She had a house——'

The stranger in tweeds turned to stare down at him, surprised.

'She had three houses,' he corrected, authoritatively. But Jermyn was not to be contradicted.

'She had a house, I say,' he repeated, with dismal obstinacy. 'A great, big, ugly, white thing. You could see it from miles away—sticking up.'

'So you could,' assented the other readily. 'It was old Colchester's notion, though he was always threatening to give her up. He couldn't stand her racket any more, he declared; it was too much of a good thing for him; he would wash his hands of her, if he never

got hold of another—and so on. I daresay he would have chucked her, only—it may surprise you—his missus wouldn't hear of it. Funny, eh? But with women, you never know how they will take a thing, and Mrs. Colchester, with her moustaches and big eyebrows, set up for being as strong-minded as they make them. She used to walk about in a brown silk dress, with a great gold cable flopping about her bosom. You should have heard her snapping out: "Rubbish!" or "Stuff and nonsense!" I daresay she knew when she was well off. They had no children, and had never set up a home anywhere. When in England she just made shift to hang out anyhow in some cheap boarding-house. I daresay she liked to get back to the comforts she was used to. She knew very well she couldn't gain by any change. And, moreover, Colchester, though a first-rate man, was not what you may call in his first youth, and, perhaps, she may have thought that he wouldn't be able to get hold of another (as he used to say) so easily. Anyhow, for one reason or another, it was "Rubbish" and "Stuff and nonsense" for the good lady. I overheard once young Mr. Apse himself say to her confidentially; "I assure you, Mrs. Colchester, I am beginning to feel quite unhappy about the name she's getting for herself." "Oh," says she, with her deep little hoarse laugh, "if one took notice of all the silly talk," and she showed Apse all her ugly false teeth at once. "It would take more than that to make me lose my confidence in her, I assure you," says she.

At this point, without any change of facial expression, Mr. Stonor emitted a short, sardonic laugh. It was very impressive, but I didn't see the fun. I looked from one to another. The stranger on the hearth-rug had an ugly smile.

And Mr. Apse shook both Mrs. Colchester's hands, he was so pleased to hear a good word said for their favourite. All these Apses, young and old you know, were perfectly infatuated with that abominable, dangerous—

'I beg your pardon,' I interrupted, for he seemed to be addressing himself exclusively to me: 'but who on earth are you talking about?'

'I am talking of the Apse family,' he answered, courteously.

I nearly let out a damn at this. But just then the respected Miss Blank put her head in, and said that the cab was at the door, if Mr. Stonor wanted to catch the eleven three up.

At once the senior pilot arose in his mighty bulk and began to struggle into his coat, with awe-inspiring upheavals. The stranger and I hurried impulsively to his assistance, and directly we laid our hands on him he became perfectly quiescent. We had to raise our arms very high, and to make efforts. It was like caparisoning a docile

elephant. With a 'Thanks, gentlemen,' he dived under and squeezed himself through the door in a great hurry.

We smiled at each other in a friendly way.

'I wonder how he manages to hoist himself up a ship's ladder,' said the man in tweeds; and poor Jermyn, who was a mere North Sea pilot, without official status or recognition of any sort, pilot only by courtesy, groaned.

'He makes eight hundred a year.'

'Are you a sailor?' I asked the stranger, who had gone back to his position on the rug.

'I used to be till a couple of years ago, when I got married,' answered this communicative individual. 'I even went to sea first in that very ship we were speaking of when you came in.'

'What ship?' I asked, puzzled. 'I never heard you mention a ship.'

'I've just told you her name, my dear sir,' he replied. 'The *Apse Family*. Surely you've heard of the great firm of Apse & Sons, ship-owners. They had a pretty big fleet. There was the *Lucy Apse*, and the *Harold Apse*, and *Anne*, *John*, *Malcolm*, *Clara*, *Juliet*, and so on—no end of *Apses*. Every brother, sister, aunt, cousin, wife—and grandmother, too, for all I know—of the firm had a ship named after them. Good, solid, old-fashioned craft they were, too, built to carry and to last. None of your new-fangled, labour-saving appliances in them, but plenty of men and plenty of good salt beef and hard tack put aboard—and off you go and fight your way out and home again.'

The miserable Jermyn made a sound of approval, which sounded like a groan of pain. Those were the ships for him. He pointed out in doleful tones that you couldn't say to labour-saving appliances; 'Jump lively now, my hearties.' No labour-saving appliance would go aloft on a dirty night with the sands under your lee.

'No,' assented the stranger, with a wink at me. 'The Apses didn't believe in them either, apparently. They treated their people well—as people don't get treated nowadays, and they were awfully proud of their ships. Nothing ever happened to them. This last one, the *Apse Family*, was to be like the others, only she was to be still stronger, still safer, still more roomy and comfortable. I believe they meant her to last for ever. They had her built composite—iron, teak-wood, and greenheart, and her scantling was something fabulous. If ever an order was given for a ship in a spirit of pride this one was. Everything of the best. The commodore captain of the employ was to command her, and they planned the accommodation for him like a house on shore under a big, tall poop that went nearly to the mainmast. No wonder Mrs. Colchester wouldn't let the old man

give her up. Why, it was the best home she ever had in all her married days. She had a nerve, that woman.

'The fuss that was made while that ship was building! Let's have this a little stronger, and that a little heavier; and hadn't that other thing better be changed for something a little thicker. The builders entered into the spirit of the game, and there she was, growing into the clumsiest, heaviest ship of her size right before all their eyes, without anybody becoming aware of it somehow. She was to be 2,000 tons register, or a little over; no less on any account. When they came to measure her she turned out 1,999 tons and a fraction. General consternation! And they say old Mr. Apse was so annoyed when they told him that he took to his bed and died. The old gentleman had retired from the firm twenty-five years before, and was ninety-six years old if a day, so his death wasn't, perhaps, so surprising. Still Mr. Lucian Apse was convinced that his father would have lived to a hundred. So we may put him at the head of the list. Next comes the poor devil of a shipwright that brute caught and squashed as she went off the ways. They called it the launch of a ship, but I've heard people say that, from the wailing and yelling and scrambling out of the way, it was more like letting a devil loose upon the river. She snapped all her checks like pack-thread, and went for the tugs in attendance like a fury. Before anybody could see what she was up to she sent one of them to the bottom, and laid up another for three months' repairs. One of her cables parted, and then, suddenly—you couldn't tell why—she let herself be brought up with the other as quiet as a lamb.

'That's how she was. You could never be sure what she would be up to next. There are ships difficult to handle, but generally you can depend on them behaving rationally. With *that* ship, whatever you did with her you never knew how it would end. She was a wicked beast. Or, perhaps, she was only just insane.'

He uttered this supposition in so earnest a tone that I could not refrain from smiling. He left off biting his lower lip to apostrophize me.

'Eh! Why not? Why couldn't there be something in her build, in her lines corresponding to—What's madness? Only something just a tiny bit wrong in the make of your brain. Why shouldn't there be a mad ship—I mean mad in a ship-like way, so that under no circumstances could you be sure she would do what any other sensible ship would naturally do for you. There are ships that steer wildly, and ships that can't be quite trusted always to stay; others want careful watching when running in a gale; and, again, there may be a ship that will make heavy weather of it in every little blow. But then

you expect her to be always so. You take it as part of her character, as a ship, just as you take account of a man's peculiarities of temper when you deal with him. But with her you couldn't. She was unaccountable. If she wasn't mad, then she was the most evil-minded, underhand, savage brute that ever went afloat. I've seen her run in a heavy gale beautifully for two days, and on the third broach to twice in the same afternoon. The first time she flung the helmsman clean over the wheel, but as she didn't quite manage to kill him she had another try about three hours afterwards. She swamped herself fore and aft, burst all the canvas we had set, scared all hands into a panic, and even frightened Mrs. Colchester down there in these beautiful stern cabins that she was so proud of. When we mustered the crew there was one man missing. Swept overboard, of course, without being either seen or heard, poor devil! and I only wonder more of us didn't go.

'Always something like that. Always. I heard an old mate tell Captain Colchester once that it had come to this with him, that he was afraid to open his mouth to give any sort of order. She was as much of a terror in harbour as at sea. You could never be certain what would hold her. On the slightest provocation she would start snapping ropes, cables, wire hawsers, like carrots. She was heavy, clumsy, unhandy—but that does not quite explain that power for mischief she had. You know, somehow, when I think of her I can't help remembering what we hear of incurable lunatics breaking loose now and then.'

He looked at me inquisitively. But, of course, I couldn't admit that a ship could be mad.

'In the ports where she was known,' he went on, 'they dreaded the sight of her. She thought nothing of knocking away twenty feet or so of solid stone facing off a quay or wiping off the end of a wooden wharf. She must have lost miles of chain and hundreds of tons of anchors in her time. When she fell aboard some poor unoffending ship it was the very devil of a job to haul her off again. And she never got hurt herself—just a few scratches or so, perhaps. They had wanted to have her strong. And so she was. Strong enough to ram Polar ice with. And as she began so she went on. From the day she was launched she never let a year pass without murdering somebody. I think the owners got very worried about it. But they were a stiff-necked generation, all these Apses; they wouldn't admit there could be anything wrong with the *Apse Family*. They wouldn't even change her name. "Stuff and nonsense," as Mrs. Colchester used to say. They ought at least to have shut her up for life in some dry dock or other, away up the river, and never let her smell salt water again.

I assure you, my dear sir, that she invariably did kill someone every voyage she made. It was perfectly well-known. She got a name for it, far and wide.'

I expressed my surprise that a ship with such a deadly reputation could ever get a crew.

'Then, you don't know what sailors are, my dear sir. Let me just show you by an instance. One day in dock at home, while loafing on the forecastle head, I noticed two respectable salts come along, one a middle-aged, competent, steady man, evidently, the other a smart, youngish man. They read the name on the bows, and stopped to look at her. Says the elder man: "*Apse Family*. That's the sanguinary female dog" (I'm putting it in that way) "of a ship, Jack, that kills a man every voyage. I wouldn't sign in her—not for Joe, I wouldn't." And the other says: "If she were mine, I'd have her towed on the mud and set on fire, blamme if I wouldn't." Then the first man chimes in: "Much do they care! Men are cheap, God knows." The younger one spat in the water alongside. "They won't have me—not for double wages."

'They hung about for some time and then walked up the dock. Half an hour later I saw them both on our deck looking about for the mate, and apparently very anxious to be taken on. And they were.'

'How do you account for this?' I asked.

'What would you say?' he retorted. 'Recklessness! The vanity of boasting in the evening to all their chums: "We've just shipped in that there *Apse Family*. Blow her. She ain't going to scare us." Sheer sailor-like perversity! A sort of curiosity. Well—a little of all that, no doubt. I put the question to them in the course of the voyage. The answer of the elderly man was:

"A man can die but once." The younger assured me in a mocking tone that he wanted to see "how she would do it this time." But I tell you what; there was a sort of fascination about the brute.'

Jermyn, who seemed to have seen every ship in the world, broke in sulkily:

'I saw her once out of this very window towing up the river; a great black ugly thing, going along like a big hearse.'

'Something sinister about her looks, wasn't there?' said the man in tweeds, looking down at old Jermyn with a friendly eye. 'I always had a sort of horror of her. She gave me a beastly shock when I was no more than fourteen, the very first day—nay, hour—I joined her. Father came up to see me off, and was to go down to Gravesend with us. I was his second boy to go to sea. My big brother was already an officer then. We got on board about eleven in the morning, and found the ship ready to drop out of the basin, stern first.



She had not moved three times her own length when, at a little pluck the tug gave her to enter the dock gates, she made one of her rampaging starts, and put such a weight on the check rope—a new six-inch hawser—that forward there they had no chance to ease it round in time, and it parted. I saw the broken end fly up high in the air, and the next moment that brute brought her quarter against the pierhead with a jar that staggered everybody about her decks. She didn't hurt herself. Not she! But one of the boys the mate had sent aloft on the mizzen to do something, came down on the poop-deck—thump—right in front of me. He was not much older than myself. We had been grinning at each other only a few minutes before. He must have been handling himself carelessly, not expecting to get such a jerk. I heard his startled cry—Oh!—in a high treble as he felt himself going, and looked up in time to see him go limp all over as he fell. Ough! Poor father was remarkably white about the gills when we shook hands in Gravesend. "Are you all right?" he says, looking hard at me. "Yes, father," "Quite sure?" "Yes, father." "Well, then good-bye, my boy." He told me afterwards that for half a word he would have carried me off home with him there and then. I am the baby of the family—you know,' added the man in tweeds, stroking his moustache with an ingenuous smile.

I acknowledged this interesting communication by a sympathetic murmur. He waved his hand carelessly.

'This might have utterly spoiled a chap's nerve for going aloft, you know—utterly. He fell within two feet of me, cracking his head on a mooring-bitt. Never moved. Stone dead. Nice-looking little fellow, he was. I had just been thinking we would be great chums. However, that wasn't yet the worst that brute of a ship could do. I served in her three years of my time, and then I got transferred to the *Lucy Apse*, for a year. The sailmaker we had in the *Apse Family* turned up there, too, and I remember him saying to me one evening, after we had been a week at sea: "Isn't she a meek little ship?" No wonder we thought the *Lucy Apse* a dear, meek, little ship after getting clear of that big, rampaging savage brute. It was like heaven. Her officers seemed to me the restfullest lot of men on earth. To me, who had known no ship but the *Apse Family*, the *Lucy* was like a sort of magical craft that did what you wanted her to do of her own accord. One evening we got caught aback pretty sharply from right ahead. In about ten minutes we had her full again, sheets aft, tacks down, decks cleared, and the officer of the watch leaning against the weather rail peacefully. It seemed simply marvellous to me. The other would have stuck for half-an-hour in irons, rolling her decks full of water, knocking the men about—spars cracking, braces

snapping, yards taking charge, and a confounded scare going on aft because of her beastly rudder, which she had a way of flapping about fit to raise your hair on end. I couldn't get over my wonder for days.

'Well, I finished my last year of apprenticeship in that jolly little ship—she wasn't so little either, but after that other heavy devil she seemed but a plaything to handle. I finished my time and passed; and then just as I was thinking of having three weeks of real good time on shore I got at breakfast a letter asking me the earliest day I could be ready to join the *Apse Family* as third mate. I gave my plate a shove that shot it into the middle of the table; dad looked up over his paper; mother raised her hands in astonishment, and I went out bare-headed into our bit of garden, where I walked round and round for an hour.

'When I came in again mother was out of the dining-room, and dad had shifted berth into his big armchair. The letter was lying on the mantelpiece.

"It's very creditable to you to get the offer, and very kind of them to make it," he said. "And I see also that Charles has been appointed chief mate of that ship for one voyage."

'There was, over leaf, a P.S. to that effect in Mr. Apse's own handwriting, which I had overlooked. Charley was my big brother.

"I don't like very much to have two of my boys together in one ship," father goes on, in his deliberate solemn way. "And I may tell you that I would not mind writing Mr. Apse a letter to that effect."

'Dear old dad! He was a wonderful father. What would you have done? The mere notion of going back (and as an officer, too), to be worried and bothered, and kept on the jump night and day by that brute, made me feel sick. But she wasn't a ship you could afford to fight shy of. Besides, the most genuine excuse could not be given without mortally offending Apse & Sons. The firm, and I believe the whole family down to the old unmarried aunts in Lancashire, had grown desperately touchy about that accursed ship's character. This was the case for answering "Ready now" from your very death-bed if you wished to die in their good graces. And that's precisely what I did answer—by wire, to have it over and done with at once.

'The prospect of being shipmates with my big brother cheered me up considerably, though it made me a bit anxious, too. Ever since I remembered myself as a little chap he had been very good to me, and I looked upon him as the finest fellow in the world. And so he was. No better officer ever walked the deck of a merchant ship. And that's a fact. He was a fine, strong, upstanding, sun-tanned, young fellow, with his brown hair curling a little, and an eye like a hawk. He was just splendid. We hadn't seen each other for many years,

and even this time, though he had been in England three weeks already, he hadn't showed up at home yet, but had spent his spare time in Surrey somewhere making up to Maggie Colchester, old Captain Colchester's niece. Her father, a great friend of dad's, was in the sugar-broking business, and Charley made a sort of second home of their house. There was a sort of sternness about Charley's face which never left it, not even when he was larking in his rather wild fashion.

'He received me with a great shout of laughter. He seemed to think my joining as an officer the greatest joke in the world. There was a difference of ten years between us, and I suppose he remembered me best in pinafores. I was a kid of four when he first went to sea. It surprised me to find how boisterous he could be.

"Now we shall see what you are made of," he cried. And he held me off by the shoulders, and punched my ribs, and hustled me into his berth. "Sit down, Ned. I am glad of the chance of having you with me. I'll put the finishing touch to you, my young officer, providing you're worth the trouble. And, first of all, get it well into your head that we are not going to let this brute kill anybody this voyage. We'll stop her racket."

'I perceived that he was in dead earnest about it. He talked grimly of the ship, and how we must be careful and never allow this ugly beast to catch us napping with any of her damned tricks.

'He gave me a regular lecture on special seamanship for the use of the *Apse Family*; then changing his tone, he began to talk at large, rattling off the wildest, funniest nonsense, till my sides ached with laughing. I could see very well he was a bit above himself with high spirits. It couldn't be because of my coming. Not to that extent. But, of course, I wouldn't have dreamt of asking what was the matter. I had a proper respect for my big brother, I can tell you. But it was all made plain enough a day or two afterwards, when I heard that Miss Maggie Colchester was coming for the voyage. Uncle was giving her a sea-trip for the benefit of her health.

'I don't know what could have been wrong with her health. She had a beautiful colour, and a deuce of a lot of fair hair. She didn't care a rap for wind, or rain, or spray, or sun, or green seas, or anything. She was a blue-eyed, jolly girl of the very best sort, but the way she cheeked my big brother used to frighten me. I always expected it to end in an awful row. However, nothing decisive happened till after we had been in Sydney for a week. One day, in the men's dinner hour, Charley sticks his head into my cabin. I was stretched out on my back on the settee, smoking in peace.

"Come ashore with me, Ned," he says, in his curt way.

'I jumped up, of course, and away after him down the gangway

and up George Street. He strode along like a giant, and I at his elbow, panting. It was confoundedly hot. "Where on earth are you rushing me to, Charley?" I made bold to ask.

"Here," he says.

"Here" was a jeweller's shop. I couldn't imagine what he could want there. It seemed a sort of mad freak. He thrusts under my nose three rings, which looked very tiny on his big, brown palm, growling out—

"For Maggie! Which?"

I got a kind of scare at this. I couldn't make a sound, but I pointed at the one that sparkled white and blue. He put it in his waistcoat pocket, paid for it with a lot of sovereigns, and bolted out. When we got on board I was quite out of breath. "Shake hands, old chap," I gasped out. He gave me a thump on the back. "Give what orders you like to the boatswain when the hands turn-to," says he; "I am off duty this afternoon."

Then he vanished from the deck for a while, but presently he came out of the cabin with Maggie, and these two went over the gangway publicly, before all hands, going for a walk together on that awful, blazing hot day, with clouds of dust flying about. They came back after a few hours looking very staid, but didn't seem to have the slightest idea where they had been. Anyway, that's the answer they both made to Mrs. Colchester's question at tea-time.

'And didn't she turn on Charley, with her voice like an old night cabman's. "Rubbish. Don't know where you've been! Stuff and nonsense. You've walked the girl off her legs. Don't do it again."

'It's surprising how meek Charley could be with that old woman. Only on one occasion he whispered to me, "I'm jolly glad she isn't Maggie's aunt, except by marriage. That's no sort of relationship." But I think he let Maggie have too much of her own way. She was hopping all over the ship in her yachting skirt and a red tam o'shanter like a bright bird on a dead black tree. The old salts used to grin to themselves when they saw her coming along, and offered to teach her knots or splices. I believe she liked the men, for Charley's sake, I suppose.

'As you may imagine, the fiendish propensities of that cursed ship were never spoken of on board. Not in the cabin, at any rate. Only once on the homeward passage Charley said, incautiously, something about bringing all her crew home this time. Captain Colchester began to look uncomfortable at once, and that silly, hard-bitten old woman flew out at Charley as though he had said something indecent. I was quite confounded myself; as to Maggie, she sat completely mystified, opening her blue eyes very wide. Of

*course, before she was a day older she wormed it all out of me. She was a very difficult person to lie to.*

"How awful," she said, quite solemn. "So many poor fellows. I am glad the voyage is nearly over. I won't have a moment's peace about Charley now."

I assured her Charley was all right. It took more than that ship knew to get over a seaman like Charley. And she agreed with me.

Next day we got the tug off Dungeness; and when the tow-rope was fast, Charley rubbed his hands and said to me in an undertone—

"We've baffled her, Ned."

"Looks like it," I said, with a grin at him. It was beautiful weather, and the sea as smooth as a millpond. We went up the river without a shadow of trouble except once, when off Hole Haven, the brute took a sudden sheer and nearly had a barge anchored just clear of the fairway. But I was aft, looking after the steering, and she did not catch me napping that time. Charley came up on the poop, looking very concerned. "Close shave," says he.

"Never mind, Charley," I answered, cheerily. "You've tamed her."

"We were to tow right up to the dock. The river pilot boarded us below Gravesend, and the first words I heard him say were: "You may just as well take your port anchor inboard at once, Mr. Mate."

"This had been done when I went forward. I saw Maggie on the forecastle head enjoying the bustle and I begged her to go aft, but she took no notice of me, of course. Then Charley, who was very busy with the head gear, caught sight of her and shouted in his biggest voice: "Get off the forecastle head, Maggie. You're in the way here." For all answer she made a funny face at him, and I saw poor Charley turn away, hiding a smile. She was flushed with the excitement of getting home again, and her blue eyes seemed to snap electric sparks as she looked at the river. A collier brig had gone round just ahead of us, and our tug had to stop her engines in a hurry to avoid running into her.

In a moment, as is usually the case, all the shipping in the reach seemed to get into a hopeless tangle. A schooner and a ketch got up a small collision all to themselves right in the middle of the river. It was exciting to watch, and, meantime, our tug remained stopped. Any other ship than that brute could have been coaxed to keep straight for a couple of minutes—but not she! Her head fell off at once, and she began to drift down, taking her tug along with her. I noticed a cluster of coasters at anchor within a quarter of a mile of us,

*and I thought I had better speak to the pilot. "If you let her get amongst that lot," I said, quietly, "she will grind some of them to bits before we get her out again."*

"Don't I know her!" cries he, stamping his foot in a perfect fury. And he out with his whistle to make that bothered tug get the ship's head up again as quick as possible. He blew like mad, waving his arm to port, and presently we could see that the tug's engines had been set going ahead. Her paddles churned the water, but it was as if she had been trying to tow a rock—she couldn't get an inch out of that ship. Again the pilot blew his whistle, and waved his arm to port. We could see the tug's paddles turning faster and faster away, broad on our bow.

For a moment tug and ship hung motionless in a crowd of moving shipping, and then the terrific strain that evil, stony-hearted brute would always put on everything, tore the towing-chock clean out. The tow-rope surged over, snapping the iron stanchions of the head-rail one after another as if they had been sticks of sealing-wax. It was only then I noticed that in order to have a better view over our heads, Maggie had stepped upon the port anchor as it lay flat on the forecastle deck.

'It had been lowered properly into its hardwood beds, but there had been no time to take a turn with it. Anyway, it was quite secure as it was, for going into dock; but I could see directly that the tow-rope would sweep under the fluke in another second. My heart flew right into my throat, but not before I had time to yell out: "Jump clear of that anchor!"

'But I hadn't time to shriek out her name. I don't suppose she heard me at all. The first touch of the hawser against the fluke threw her down; she was up on her feet again quick as lightning, but she was up on the wrong side. I heard a horrid, scraping sound, and then that anchor, tipping over, rose up like something alive; its great, rough iron arm caught Maggie round the waist, seemed to clasp her close with a dreadful hug, and flung itself with her over and down in a terrific clang of iron, followed by heavy ringing blows that shook the ship from stem to stern—because the ring stopper held!

'How horrible!' I exclaimed.

'I used to dream for years afterwards of anchors catching hold of girls,' said the man in tweeds, a little wildly. He shuddered. 'With a most pitiful howl Charley was over after her almost on the instant. But, Lord! he didn't see as much as a gleam of her red tam o'shanter in the water. Nothing! nothing whatever! In a moment there were half-a-dozen boats around us, and he got pulled into one. I, with the boatswain and the carpenter, let go the other anchor in a hurry and

brought the ship up somehow. The pilot had gone silly. He walked up and down the forecastle head wringing his hands and muttering to himself: "Killing women, now! Killing women, now!" Not another word could you get out of him.

'Dusk fell, then a night black as pitch; and peering upon the river I heard a low, mournful hail, "Ship, ahoy!" Two Gravesend watermen came alongside. They had a lantern in their wherry, and looked up the ship's side, holding on to the ladder without a word. I saw in the patch of light a lot of loose, fair hair down there.'

He shuddered again.

'After the tide turned poor Maggie's body had floated clear of one of them big mooring buoys,' he explained. 'I crept aft, feeling half-dead, and managed to send a rocket up—to let the other searchers know, on the river. And then I slunk away forward like a cur, and spent the night sitting on the heel of the bowsprit so as to be as far as possible out of Charley's way.'

'Poor fellow!' I murmured.

'Yes. Poor fellow,' he repeated, musingly. 'That brute wouldn't let him—not even him—cheat her of her prey. But he made her fast in dock next morning. He did. We hadn't exchanged a word—not a single look for that matter. I didn't want to look at him. When the last rope was fast he put his hands to his head and stood gazing down at his feet as if trying to remember something. The men waited on the main deck for the words that end the voyage. Perhaps that is what he was trying to remember. I spoke for him. "That'll do, men."

'I never saw a crew leave a ship so quietly. They sneaked over the rail one after another, taking care not to bang their sea chests too heavily. They looked our way, but not one had the stomach to come up and offer to shake hands with the mate, as is usual.

'I followed him all over the empty ship to and fro, here and there, with no living soul about but the two of us, because the old ship-keeper had locked himself up in the galley—both doors. Suddenly poor Charlie mutters, in a crazy voice: "I'm done here," and strides down the gangway with me at his heels, up the dock, out at the gate, on towards Tower Hill. He used to take rooms with a decent old landlady in America Square, to be near his work.

'All at once he stops short, turns round, and comes back straight at me. "Ned," says he, "I am going home." I had the good luck to sight a four-wheeler and got him in just in time. His legs were beginning to give way. In our hall he fell down on a chair, and I'll never forget father's and mother's amazed, perfectly still faces as they stood over him. They couldn't understand what had happened

to him till I blubbered out, "Maggie got drowned, yesterday, in the river."

'Mother let out a little cry. Father looks from him to me, and from me to him, as if comparing our faces—for, upon my soul, Charley did not resemble himself at all. Nobody moved; and the poor fellow raises his big brown hands slowly to his throat, and with one single tug rips everything open—collar, shirt, waistcoat—a perfect wreck and ruin of a man. Father and I got him upstairs somehow, and mother pretty nearly killed herself nursing him through a brain fever.'

The man in tweeds nodded at me significantly.

'Ah! there was nothing that could be done with that brute. She had the devil in her.'

'Where's your brother?' I asked, expecting to hear he was dead. But he was commanding a smart steamer on the China coast, and never came home now.

Jermyn fetched a heavy sigh, and the handkerchief being now sufficiently dry, put it up tenderly to his red and lamentable nose.

'She was a ravening beast,' the man in tweeds started again. 'Old Colchester put his foot down and resigned. And would you believe it? Apse and Sons & rote to ask whether he wouldn't reconsider his decision! Anything to save the good name of the *Apse Family*! Old Colchester went to the office then and said that he would take charge again but only to sail her out into the North Sea and scuttle her there. He was nearly off his chump. He used to be darkish iron-grey, but his hair went snow-white in a fortnight. And Mr. Lucian Apse (they had known each other as young men) pretended not to notice it. Eh? Here's infatuation if you like! Here's pride for you!

'They jumped at the first man they could get to take her, for fear of the scandal of the *Apse Family* not being able to find a skipper. He was a festive soul, I believe, but he stuck to her grim and hard. Wilnot was his second mate. A harum-scarum fellow, and pretending to a great scorn for all the girls. The fact is he was really timid. But let only one of them do as much as lift her little finger in encouragement, and there was nothing that could hold the beggar. As apprentice, once, he deserted abroad after a petticoat, and would have gone to the dogs then, if his skipper hadn't taken the trouble to find him and lug him by the ears out of some house of perdition or other.

'It was said that one of the firm had been heard once to express a hope that this brute of a ship would get lost soon. I can hardly credit the tale, unless it might have been Mr. Alfred Apse, whom the family didn't think much of. They had him in the office, but he was



considered a bad egg altogether, always flying off to race meetings and coming home drunk. You would have thought that a ship so full of deadly tricks would run herself ashore some day out of sheer cussedness. But not she! She was going to last for ever. She had a nose to keep off the bottom.'

Jermyn made a grunt of approval.

'A ship after a pilot's own heart, eh?' jeered the man in tweeds. 'Well, Wilmot managed it. He was the man for it, but even he, perhaps, couldn't have done the trick without the green-eyed governess, or nurse, or whatever she was to the children of Mr. and Mrs. Pamphilus.'

'Those people were passengers in her from Port Adelaide to the Cape. Well, the ship went out and anchored outside for the day. The skipper—hospitable soul—had a lot of guests from town to a farewell lunch—as usual with him. It was five in the evening before the last shore boat left the side, and the weather looked ugly and dark in the gulf. There was no reason for him to get under way. However, as he had told everybody he was going that day, he imagined it was proper to do so anyhow. But as he had no mind after all these festivities to tackle the straits in the dark, with a scant wind, he gave orders to keep the ship under lower topsails and foresail as close as she would lie, dodging along the land till the morning. Then he sought his virtuous couch. The mate was on deck, having his face washed very clean with hard rain squalls. Wilmot relieved him at midnight.'

'The *Apse Family* had, as you observed, a house on her poop . . .'

'A big, ugly white thing, sticking up,' Jermyn murmured, sadly, at the fire.

'That's it: a companion for the cabin stairs and a sort of chart-room combined. The rain drove in gusts on the sleepy Wilmot. The ship was then surging slowly to the southward, close hauled, with the coast within three miles or so to windward. There was nothing to look out for in that part of the gulf, and Wilmot went round to dodge the squalls under the lee of that chart-room, whose door on that side was open. The night was black, like a barrel of coal-tar. And then he heard a woman's voice whispering to him.'

'That confounded green-eyed girl of the Pamphilus people had put the kids to bed a long time ago, of course, but it seems couldn't get to sleep herself. She heard eight bells struck, and the chief mate come below to turn in. She waited a bit, then got into her dressing-gown and stole across the empty saloon and up the stairs into the chart-room. She sat down on the settee near the open door to cool herself, I daresay.'

'I suppose when she whispered to Wilmot it was as if somebody had struck a match in the fellow's brain. I don't know how it was they had got so very thick. I fancy he had met her ashore a few times before. I couldn't make it out, because, when telling the story, Wilmot would break off to swear something awful at every second word. We had met on the quay in Sydney, and he had an apron of sacking up to his chin, a big whip in his hand. A wagon-driver. Glad to do anything not to starve. That's what he had come down to.

However, there he was, with his head inside the door, on the girl's shoulder as likely as not—officer of the watch! The helmsman, on giving his evidence afterwards, said that he shouted several times that the binnacle lamp had gone out. It didn't matter to him, because his orders were to "sail her close". "I thought it funny," he said, "that the ship should keep on falling off in squalls, but I luffed her up every time as close as I was able. It was so dark I couldn't see my hand before my face, and the rain came in bucketsful on my head."

"The truth was that at every squall the wind hauled aft a little, till gradually the ship came to be heading straight for the coast, without a single soul in her being aware of it. Wilmot himself confessed that he had not been near the standard compass for an hour. He might well have confessed! The first thing he knew was the man on the look-out shouting blue murder forward there.

'He tore his neck free, he says, and yelled back at him: "What do you say?"

"I think I hear breakers ahead, sir," howled the man, and came rushing aft with the rest of the watch, in the "awfullest blinding deluge that ever fell from the sky," Wilmot says. For a second or so he was so scared and bewildered that he could not remember on which side of the gulf the ship was. He wasn't a good officer, but he was a seaman all the same. He pulled himself together in a second, and the right orders sprang to his lips without thinking. They were to hard up with the helm and shiver the main and mizzen-topsails.

'It seems that the sails actually fluttered. He couldn't see them, but he heard them rattling and banging above his head. "No use! She was too slow in going off," he went on, his dirty face twitching, and the damn'd carter's whip shaking in his hand. "She seemed to stick fast." And then the flutter of the canvas above his head ceased. At this critical moment the wind hauled aft again with a gust, filling the sails and sending the ship with a great way upon the rocks on her lee bow. She had overreached herself in her last little game. Her time had come—the hour, the man, the black night, the treacherous

gust of wind—the right woman to put an end to her. The brute deserved nothing better. Strange are the instruments of Providence. There's a sort of poetical justice—'

The man in tweeds looked hard at me.

'The first ledge she went over stripped the false keep off her. Rip! The skipper, rushing out of his berth, found a crazy woman in a red flannel dressing gown, flying round and round the cuddy, screeching like a cockatoo.

'The next bump knocked her clean under the cabin table. It also started the stern-post and carried away the rudder, and then that brute ran up a shelving, rocky shore, tearing her bottom out, till she stopped short, and the foremast dropped over the bows like a gangway.'

'Anybody lost?' I asked.

'No one, unless that fellow, Wilmot,' answered the gentleman, unknown to Miss Blank, looking round for his cap. 'And his case was worse than drowning for a man. Everybody got ashore all right. Gale didn't come on till next day, dead from the West, and broke up that brute in a surprisingly short time. It was as though she had been rotten at heart.' . . . He changed his tone. 'Rain left off. I must get my bike and rush home to dinner. I live in Herne Bay—came out for a spin this morning.'

He nodded at me in a friendly way, and went out with a swagger.

'Do you know who he is, Jermyn?' I asked.

The North Sea pilot shook his head, dismally. 'Fancy losing a ship in that silly fashion! Oh, dear! oh dear!' he groaned in lugubrious tones, spreading his damp handkerchief again like a curtain before the glowing grate.

On going out I exchanged a glance and a smile (strictly proper) with the respectable Miss Blank, barmaid of the Three Crows.

# CONCERNING A TREATY WITH FRANCE

BY MAJOR W. P. DRURY

## Part I

**I** DOUBT if even the eternal afternoon of the Lotus Eaters could have been mellower, or drowsier, or altogether more peaceful than that of the 6th of September, 1898, at Candia, in the romantic island of Crete.

The heat haze of a Mediterranean autumn hung over land and water, blurring the rim of the sapphire sea upon the north, wrapping in mystery the purple loom of the Sleeping Turk Mountain in the south, and softening the spikiness of the minaret-studded city itself. Never had a day jawned with more roseate promise or waxed to high noon in more golden assurance of fulfilment. Yet rarely has one waned and died more dreadfully than this same Bloody Tuesday of the Cretan 'September Massacres.'

At half-past one, or thereabouts, a piquet of British Highlanders under a subaltern swung unsuspectingly along the sea road from their camp upon the city wall to the watergate which gives upon the quay. The Great Powers, in their collective wisdom, had appointed that hour for the gathering of a tax, a tax that commended itself even less than most imposts to the picturesque and highly emotional people upon whom it was levied. So strongly, indeed, did the Bashi-Bazouks feel in the matter that every inother's son of them to the number of twenty or thirty thousand had for days past, and for the purpose of backing his opinion, hugged beneath his rags a gun and a six-inch knife. To ensure the courteous treatment of the taxgatherers by these malcontents, the Powers had despatched a boy with a claymore, a revolver, and a handful of foot-soldiers in trews; and very cross the Powers were next morning at breakfast to learn that the boy, with certain of his men, had been killed at the watergate, that the remainder had been scattered like leaves before an equinoctial gale, and that six hundred men, women and children of the Christian faith lay stark in the blazing streets.

Other things the Powers presently learned, to wit, the dastardly

attack upon the hospital and the penning of the British garrison into an angle of the bastion wall. Then they were angry, and one or two at least, so 'twas whispered, conscience-stricken as well. The needle clicked with righteous indignation in half a dozen Foreign Offices and Admiralties, and the troops and cruisers of as many Christian nations were set in motion towards that smoking shambles in the shadow of the sleeping Turk.

In due course they reached it, the first arrival being, as was only fitting under the circumstances, a British battleship. On the morning of the Bloody Tuesday's morrow a hundred of her redcoats struggled through the raging surf to reinforce their hard-pressed Highland comrades on the wall; and by the end of the week this gallant nucleus had grown into a cosmopolitan army such as had probably never before been brought together within the confines of one camp. Hard on the heels of the British Marines came their scarcely less famous namesakes of France. Northumberland, Irish, and Welsh Fusiliers from the neighbouring garrisons of Egypt, taciturn sailors from Russia, brisk *bersaglieri* from Italy, tatterdemalions from Turkey, all (except the last-mentioned, who were already on the spot and were credited with more than half the trouble) came flocking with a kaleidoscopic medley of uniforms and a babel of hoarse commands to the international camp upon the wall of Candia.

During the monotonous weeks which elapsed between the assembling of this punitive force and the hangings upon the great gallows which signalled its dispersal, many acquaintances were made and no few friendships formed between comrades of alien races. And of these friendships none, perhaps, was more incongruous at the outset, yet more enduring in its continuance or more solemn in its termination, than that between Lieutenant Allingham-Foote of the Royal Marine Light Infantry, and Sous-Lieutenant Loiserolles, of the *Infanterie de Marine*.

Who can say what strange magnetic influence attracted the pair—till now so widely sundered—towards each other? By heredity, in a family as well as in a national sense, they should have been sworn foes; for—so they learned in one of their early conversations—their grandsires had fallen, the one within, the other without, a British square at Quatre Bras. In creed, political and religious, they were at variance; for, although being boys—their united ages scarce compassing that of a man in his prime—they were not given to the discussion of such matters, each was secretly convinced of the other's heresy. On the more pressing (though less dangerous) questions of art and sport they were equally out of sympathy; for while the British Philistine's ridicule of French impressionism filled the dis-

ciple of that school with sorrow, the latter's scheme for the reformation of 'soccer' drove his shuddering friend to the borders of profanity. It was a question of sport, nevertheless, which first brought them into contact and laid the foundation of the strange alliance I am about to chronicle.

As each of the international detachments arrived, its officers were invited to become honorary member of the British (and only existing) mess; and in the matter of language the Feast of Pentecost itself could scarcely have been more cosmopolitan than the nightly dinner at Candia.

One evening the conversation of the Englishmen happened to turn upon their chances of being at Epsom for the next great national event, and Loiserolles, who sat near them, grew interested in the debate.

'But where, then, monsieur,' he at length inquired of his neighbour, 'is this Epsom?'

The officer appealed to was a naval lieutenant of the school that regards all foreigners as 'niggers.' Being loftily ignorant, however, of every 'nigger' tongue in Europe, he was in the habit of addressing a French count (when he met one) in the same pidgin English with which he bullyragged a Chinese coolie; and it was an axiom of his that the densest alien could be made to comprehend, provided only that one shouted loudly enough.

'Ma tante Maria!' he bawled, aghast at the Frenchman's ignorance; 'you no savvy number one piece English festa? You no savvy Derby horse race, Johnnie?'

'*Hélas, monsieur!*' returned the other smilingly, 'I have the misfortune not to understand your language.'

Before Aunt Maria's nephew had finished shrugging his shoulders—an action which fully persuaded him that he had been speaking French—another Englishman quietly leaned across the table and fluently answered his *vis-à-vis*' question in the latter's own tongue.

Loiserolles bowed.

'I am exceedingly obliged to you,' he said courteously. 'You must forgive the stupidity of a foreigner in forgetting that your great race is run on Epsom Downs, and not at Derby, as its name would seem to suggest. Thank you for setting me right!'

The sailor twisted round in his chair and stared at him in resentful surprise.

'You told me,' he said severely, 'that you did not understand our language!'

'Pardon me, monsieur,' returned the Frenchman, still smiling: 'your language, I believe I said.'

Thus began the brief, yet lifelong, friendship between the two boys, for the speaker in French was Allingham-Foote, passed interpreter, and commanding officer of the British Marines at Candia. In the anteroom after dinner Loiserolles elbowed his way through the crowd to compliment the Englishman on his accent and mastery of idiom.

The other laughed pleasantly.

'My dear fellow,' said he, 'although foreign languages may not be the strong point of our Service, I assure you that the majority of us do get beyond pidgin English.'

'But few arrive as far as Monsieur. One would say that he was more than half a Frenchman.'

Allingham-Foote stiffened into the 'correct position of a soldier.' 'Then I am afraid, monseur,' he said, a trifle coldly, 'that one would pay me an undeserved honour, though it is true that most of my childhood was spent in your country. But you? You must have lived at least half your life in England to speak the language as you do.'

'Alas!' Loiserolles sighed, 'I have never yet crossed La Manche. But my mother was American, so that Anglo-Saxon is literally my mother tongue, you see. Thanks, I have a match; shall we sit down?'

Before the mess closed that evening with the usual clanking and jingling of Europe's departing warriors, England and France, unsuspected by Downing Street or the Quai d'Orsay, had settled the Cretan question to their entire mutual satisfaction. In the corner where the two had established themselves they had disposed of questions more complex even than that, smoking innumerable cigarettes the while, and setting their forefingers on weak spots in the government of the universe with the cocksureness of healthy youth. The descent from the universal to the personal was effected between the lighting and blowing out of a match. For the universe was left to take care of itself after the discovery that Loiserolles was descended from that gallant old noble—immortalised by Carlyle—who, hoodwinking his gaolers, went to the guillotine in his son's stead, and that one of Allingham-Foote's forbears had been decorated by the Emperor for saving the life of a French officer in the Crimea. The fact of both belonging to the same famous corps of their respective services was no doubt another link of sympathy between them. But I think that the mainspring of the friendship formed that night lay in the strange coincidence that each was sprung from a line of gallant soldiers whose motto had been 'Pro Patria,' and that they themselves were alone in the world, the last of their respective races.

The following day Sous-Lieutenant Loiserolles paid a little visit

of ceremony to the officer commanding the British Marines in Candia, and half an hour later, in compliance with the inexorable demands of international etiquette, the call was returned with equal formality by Lieutenant Allingham-Foote. It is true that their united commands fell short of a hundred and seventy souls. Yet each considered this punctilious exchange of compliments due no less to himself than to the great nation he represented, and, the duty discharged, all stiffness between them vanished.

The French camp adjoined the British, and the visits (with the ceremony omitted) were repeated daily. The barrier of language, which restricted the majority of the allies to posturing and the baldest of commonplaces, had no existence for the two Marines; and as the weeks wore on the friendship between them strengthened and grew apace.

On a certain evening towards the end of the month and of their sojourn in Candia the pair strolled out from the mess hut for a quiet after-dinner smoke upon the bastion edge. Low in the western heavens hung a brilliant three-quarters moon, lining the plain before them with long shadows of windmills, and giving the cemetery wall the appearance of a square ruled on grey paper in Chinese white and ink. On the right the sea, so turbulent by day at this period of the year, was sobbing itself, like a fractious child, to sleep. In the dim distance, cheek by jowl with the moon, rose the classic peak of Ida, while nearer at hand upon the left, outlined on the southern sky, and with its inscrutable face turned towards the zenith, lay the everlasting hill of the Sleeping Turk.

For some time they smoked in silence, the one sucking thoughtfully at a pipe that apparently would not draw, the other puffing dreamily at a cigarette that demanded constant relighting. For the spell of the night was upon them, with its mystery of mountain and sea; perhaps, also—who knows?—the spell of another Night, which the moonlight is powerless to illuminate, yet whose morrow is endless Day.

Allingham-Foote was the first to speak.

'The worst of the business is over now,' he mused, 'and I may be recalled to the ship any day. Well, for some reasons I shall be jolly glad; for others—onc, at all events—I shall, on the contrary, be—Loiserolles, old man'—he impulsively held out his hand—'we have been good pals, you and I, haven't we?'

The Frenchman glanced involuntarily at the long line of lights which marked the position of the international squadron in the roadstead.

'The very best,' he returned huskily, gripping the other's fingers.



'I, too, am daily expecting my marching orders—to Canea first; afterwards—who knows to what distant corner of the globe? It will be a strange coincidence, *mon ami*, if you and I ever cross each other's path again.'

The pipe still refusing to draw, its owner spent several moments in probing it with a hairpin he sentimentally kept for that purpose.

'The odds are a thousand to one against it,' he admitted, his efforts being crowned at length with indifferent success. 'Of course, in the event of war between your country and mine the chances of our meeting might be greater. Even then they would be remote.'

Loiserolles lit another cigarette. 'So much the better,' he returned gravely, 'for, good comrades though we are now, our duty in such a deplorable case would require us to be equally good enemies. And neither a Loiserolles nor an Allingham-Foote,' he added proudly, 'would fail in his duty to his country.'

The last remark seemed to the Englishman too obvious to need verbal assent, and several moments elapsed before he spoke again.

'I wonder,' he said presently, 'what one's sensations would be if in the course of an action one were about to kill a pal on the other side. I mean, which feeling would be uppermost—affection for an old comrade, or love of country, with its consequent hatred of her enemies?'

'Or, to push a highly improbable case a stage further,' rejoined Loiserolles, 'one might speculate on the *post-mortem* sentiments of the one killed.'

'Speculate—yes. Know—in life, at all events—never.'

'I am not so sure of that.'

The low, deliberate tones of the speaker caused Allingham-Foote to look up with sudden curiosity. The careless, light-hearted young French officer, to whom his heart had warmed, was gazing dreamily over the plain towards the mountains on the south-western horizon; but even in the fast waning moonlight it was evident that his vision was not bounded by the everlasting hills. Beyond those hills lay the sea, beyond the sea—Africa. . . . What was that whitewashed building, so silent, so deserted, in the glare of an African noon? Whose was that shadow on the verandah, the inexorable shadow creeping towards the window with the broken *jalousie*? . . .

His friend laid his hand on his shoulder. 'Well,' he admitted half jestingly, 'there *are*, no doubt, more things in heaven and earth—you know the quotation, Loiserolles. Come now, let us make a treaty, you and I—the Anglo-French Treaty of Sleeping Turk Hill, we might call it—something on these lines.' He smoked thoughtfully for some seconds. 'Yes. In the event of either of us dying under the

improbable circumstances I suggested, he shall return in the spirit to the survivor, as a guarantee that he recognises the exigencies of duty and that he bears his slayer no ill will.'

But Loiserolles slowly shook his head. He was still looking towards the distant mountains, and the cigarette between his lips had gone out.

'I possess what you call in Scotland the "gift of second sight,"' he said, 'and though I cannot foresee the precise manner of our death, I have a premonition that neither of us will fall in action. Nevertheless, we will have our treaty. Our profession will carry us far asunder and into remote corners of the earth. But wherever, and in whatever form, death may overtake us, of this I am certain, that each of us will strive to make a good end for the honour of his country. Therefore let him who goes first tell the other how he died, so that the survivor, when his turn comes, may be strengthened by the memory of his friend's example.'

'Similar pacts have been made before now,' mused Allingham- Foote, knocking the ashes from his pipe, 'and in many instances have been carried out. The treaty—who knows?—may not be as chimerical as it appears, and—anyhow, there's my hand on it, Loiserolles.'

The Frenchman hung his cigarette over the bastion edge.

'And mine,' he said, with a grip like a steel vice; and in the same moment the last gleam of the moon's rim sank behind Ida.

## Part II

Towards the end of September, 1900, a weatherworn, sea-battered tramp steamer rolled dejectedly at her single anchor in the ground swell of Sierra Leone. From her ensign staff drooped the tricolour of France, from her main truck her ragged, smoke-grimed house flag, while the finishing touch to her general appearance of abandonment was supplied by the wisp of yellow bunting which trailed from the fore. Having called at the infected port of St. Louis, the capital of Senegal, the unhappy tramp was now paying for her indiscretion by eating out her heart in the dreary isolation of quarantine.

Besides the captain's wife and child she carried but one passenger, an Englishman of extraordinarily interesting personality. Some twelve years earlier Justican Occleshaw, of Guy's, had qualified with such a string of diplomas that more than one eminent surgeon had endeavoured to dissuade him from his purpose of entering the naval medical service. The Navy, they insisted, was far too restricted a field for a man of his peculiar energy and talents, a man who might

reasonably hope one day to make a name in the arena of research. The laboratory, not a gunboat's sick bay, should be the goal of his ambition, they urged—with much to the same effect. But to all these counsels of the elders the young man turned an ear deafer than that of old age. The sea was calling to him, and who can listen to aught else when that call, now raised in imperious command, now sunk to an alluring whisper, haunts him day and night?

But although he never wavered in his allegiance to the sea itself, the Service he entered, with its soul-harrying routine and its (from his point of view) tape-strangled, obsolete methods, at first saddened, then sickened him. The death of a distant relative, however, made him unexpectedly a wealthy, independent man. In the West Indies he had devoted himself to the study of tropical diseases; and on quitting the Navy with a gratuity after eight years' service he continued with renewed zest to prosecute his researches. It was in a Marseilles hospital, where he was observing certain interesting cases, that he heard of the fearful epidemic of yellow fever in the French colony of Senegal. With the greatest difficulty—the Messageries Maritimes having temporarily ceased to call on that coast—he obtained a passage in a tramp bound from St. Louis; and he had now reached Sierra Leone with a largely increased experience of the subject nearest his heart and with material for another of those remarkable monographs which were rapidly establishing his reputation.

In Occleshaw's case the annoyance of quarantine was considerably aggravated by the presence, within a few cables, of a British gunboat. Now, whatever may have been his views on Admiralty methods, the ex-naval surgeon had a warm corner in his heart for old comrades; and the yearning was strong upon him to sit once more in the smoking circle and listen to the familiar Service jargon. For many weeks, too, he had been completely cut off from civilisation and all news of the outer world, and a glimpse of the gunboat's newly arrived mail bags filled him with the pangs of Tantalus. What wonder, then, that ten minutes after pratique had been granted by the health officer, and the irritating yellow flag had been hauled down, Justican Occleshaw stepped from the tramp's disreputable dinghy on to the bleached and brass-bound accommodation ladder of the British man-of-war?

He was received, as he had well known he would be, with the open-handed hospitality for which the Royal Navy is renowned. The captain placed a spare sleeping-bunk at his disposal; the quintet in the wardroom made him an honorary member of their mess; the surgeon—who felt himself shine with a reflected light from this

rising sun of his profession—talked shop with him and lent him the latest *Lancet*. Everyone, in a word, was anxious to do honour to a late brother officer to whom it was becoming the fashion to refer as the 'eminent specialist.'

They were amply repaid. At first, it is true, their guest listened and they did all the talking. But after dinner, when they were settled in deck-chairs under the poop awning, and the orange moon of the tropics seemed to be rising like a gigantic fire-balloon from the heart of the dark continent, it was they who listened while the guest talked. And presently he told them a curious story.

It appeared that on reaching St. Louis he had found the colony—as a hurriedly departing colonel of the *Tirailleurs* had informed him—*en pleine épidémie*. In Dakar, Gorée and Rifsique not a single European remained, all who had not died of it having fled from the yellow terror. From St. Louis itself the white exodus was in full swing, though in consequence of the non-arrival of the big Messageries boats the panic-stricken rush of men, women and children was greatly hindered, and many were mowed down by the relentless scythe before they could escape. By means, however, of the half-dozen tramps and coasters which chanced to be in the port (and by payment, doubtless, of exorbitant passage money) even this thinned-out crowd of survivors presently melted away.

With the exception of a forlorn and decimated company of *Tirailleurs*, the garrison, too, had vanished. The majority of those splendid colonial troops, the Marine Infantry, had been sent home to France, the remainder being distributed in the interior, far from the infected centres. The *Spahis* and the 'guides' with loaded carbines, were cantoned in an isolated camp in the country. Not a soldier was to be seen, not a bugle-call to be heard in the streets and barrack yards of the mourning city; the military glory of St. Louis, like its trade, had departed.

'So at least it seemed to me,' continued the narrator, 'as I stood in the middle of the deserted Government Square, itself the very centre of the pest-ridden district. The intense glare of dust and white-wash under the midday sun was intermittently toned by clouds of drifting smoke; for at every street corner, piled high with dead men's effects, great bonfires roared and crackled from morning to night. A couple of native carriers with a closely shut litter hurried across the square; the poor mean hearse of a non-commissioned officer of *Tirailleurs* ambled past on its way to the cemetery; everything was suggestive of desolation, terror, and death.

'Yet St. Louis was not the unredeemed Ichabod it seemed to be; the military glory of France had not all departed. There before me,

in the very heart of the stricken and abandoned city, lay an example of heroism and devotion to duty that was little short of sublime.

'One of the sides of Government Square at St. Louis is formed by a large, whitewashed barrack, which, as long as it stands, will possess an inevitable notoriety. For here it was that the great yellow fever epidemic originated, three unfortunate soldiers dying on the first day, and a fortnight before my arrival the building had been evacuated by the troops and closed. But while I was thinking how the drooping jalousie of one of the windows accentuated its general forlornness, a native orderly hurriedly descended the verandah steps, and I crossed the square to meet him.

"Are these barracks, then, re-occupied?" I asked in French.

"*Mais oui, monsieur*," he returned, with blanched features. "by one man and—the Black Vomit!"

Five minutes later the great, jalousie darkened rooms and corridors of the empty building were filled with the echoes of my footsteps, of the footsteps, too—a more imaginative man might have sworn—of men dead and buried a fortnight before.

'It was in a corner of the room with the broken jalousie that I found him—alone and, as was plain at the first glance, already beyond human aid. From the presence of certain remedies and from other signs I gathered that he had been medically treated in an earlier stage of the disease; but, so rapid is the march of events where the Yellow King holds sway, it was more than probable that the doctor had preceded his patient to the grave. The boy—he could have been no more than one or two-and-twenty—had been left by the terror-stricken attendant to fight the dreadful battle single-handed; and who can say what agony he had suffered—this lad so far from home and on the very threshold of life—as the lonely, stifling hours dragged on, and the grip of the loathsome enemy tightened about his waist?

'After carrying out the few simple measures that were possible for the relief and comfort of the patient, I sat down by the bedside with notebook and thermometer to watch the case and wait for the inevitable end. From the uniform tumbled about the room, a uniform with which I had been familiar in the streets of Marseilles and Toulon, I knew that the dying boy was a sous-lieutenant in the Marine Infantry; and I afterwards learnt that he had volunteered to command the last of the troops left in the town—a fever-weakened company of *Tirailleurs*—and that he was the one white officer of that great garrison who had stuck to his deadly post. On a table near the bed lay his open journal, the last entry in which had been made the previous day; and, knowing that the volume must be subse-

quently burnt with the remainder of his effects, I hastily made a few extracts to send to his friends in France. I have them with me here, and, since there is nothing in them of a private nature, I will, if you care to hear it, read you one.'

No need to ask the little audience on the gunboat's poop whether they cared to hear it! As the tale had proceeded every face had been turned towards the speaker, and more than one pipe had been suffered to go unlighted lest even the striking of a match should break the spell of the story. When Occleshaw produced from his breast pocket a worn and bulky notebook, someone picked up the Colomb's lantern from the deck and held it over his shoulder.

The guest thanked him. 'The original,' he continued, turning over the leaves of the pocket-book, 'was, of course, in French. This—ah! here it is—is a translation:—

"St. Louis, 20th August, 1900. The implacable foe is absolute master, and one lives in the midst of confusion, mourning and death. I have now been over a fortnight in the very centre of the pestilence, and fortunately have so far escaped. But one must not boast! For some months to come Lower Senegal must continue to be the prey of the deadly microbes.

"To-day the Government cabled us all to come home. But, by an oversight doubtless, they have forgotten to send us the means of transport! In the deserted streets a week ago I met Antoine, weak and terribly shaken after his late attack. He was to go home by the following day's Messagerie. 'Only a few more hours in this inferno!' he whispered gleefully, as we shook hands. I shall always remember those last words of his. Alas! the Messageries have deserted us, and—I have just returned from Antoine's funeral in the vast cemetery, where colonel and private alike have no other tomb than a mound and a piece of board.

"Here, then, in the heart of the silent town, I am going to stay till the end—probably, that is to say, till death. The thought of death, however, even in the form of the black vomit, does not trouble me. I am not bragging: I am really proud to remain at this post, and should like to thank the General for giving it to me. I have set my affairs in order; there is nothing more for me to do but to wait the issue of events."

'I have other extracts here,' added Occleshaw, 'but the one I have read will show you the manner of soldier France presently lost in this sous-lieutenant of Marines.

'The sweltering, tainted afternoon wore on, and the shadows of the tall buildings on the far side of Government Square lengthened until they began to creep up the barrack wall beneath the window

with the drooping jealousy. In spite of my profession, in spite of the absorbing interest of the case I was watching, the emptiness of the vast building got upon my nerves, and the fancy grew in my brain that there was another shadow advancing along the verandah wall, a shadow cast by no building, the inexorable shadow of death.

'So keenly were my faculties employed in following the progress of the disease that even now I can scarcely bring myself to believe that I really fell asleep. At the utmost my doze could not have lasted more than a couple of minutes. Yet how otherwise could a third person have entered and crossed that huge bare room without my knowledge? The door was twenty yards away, the floor uncarpeted. Nevertheless, through the mosquito curtains I suddenly saw, sitting on the opposite side of the bed, the figure of an English soldier.'

As Occleshaw paused abruptly the silence, except for the gentle lapping of the water under the gunboat's counter, was intense.

'I have been some years out of the Service,' he went on a moment later, 'and I cannot remember. Tell me, do our Marines ever wear red in the tropics?'

So utterly unexpected was the question that several seconds elapsed before it received an answer. It came at last from the skipper.

'Never to my knowledge,' he said. 'In this climate a man would sweat a red coat purple before he'd had it on five minutes.'

'As this one had—for it was a subaltern of the British Marines who, knowingly or not, had walked straight into the jaws of death. For some reason best known to himself he wore his red serge, and—so bathed in perspiration was he in consequence—his jacket was completely darkened and discoloured by it. Never in all my experience have I seen a man drip sweat as he did; had he been overboard he could hardly have been wetter. Who was he, I began to wonder, and what was an English officer doing at that awful time in Senegal?'

'A moment later he had passed completely from my mind, for the patient was now happily come to an end of his sufferings, and lay *in articulo mortis*. The odds against which the yellow fever patient has to struggle are indeed tremendous, and perhaps no one could appreciate better than I the gallant fight for existence the dying boy had made. He still rambled feebly, his delusion being, I remember, that he was watching from a high wall somewhere near the sea the revolving sails of windmills on a moonlit plain below; but he was rapidly sinking into the merciful anæsthesia which is so often the immediate forerunner of death.

'And then, for a few brief moments, he rallied. Every word he had hitherto uttered—Heaven alone knows how many they were!—

had been in his native tongue. To me, therefore, who had listened the livelong afternoon to the shoutings of delirium in a foreign language, it seemed like a gleam of sunshine after a gloomy day when he suddenly began to speak in coherent and fluent English.

"Comrade," he said, and there was a tinge of reproach in his voice, "I had not forgotten our treaty—the Treaty of Sleeping Turk Hill. I was coming. If you had waited—but a few minutes longer—I would have been with you."

"So clear and deliberate were the words that, had it not been for their utter inconsequence, I should have said that his reason had returned in the last few moments of life. I did not hear the other's answer, it is true. Yet he must have whispered something that was audible to the dying lad, for the latter, with increased difficulty, presently spoke again.

"You, too, have done well, my friend," he gasped. "But it is hard to die so soon. There were things that I wished to do. Ah! yes" (he smiled feebly), "to reform your 'soccer' was one. As it is—for a few hours, perhaps, England and France will be proud of Allingham-Foot and Henri Loiscrolles. *Eh bien! Je suis fatigué, mon camarade. Allons!*"

'And so he died, the knuckles of his outstretched hand falling with a pathetic rattle on the seat of the empty chair. For, when I peered through the mosquito curtains into the suddenly gathered shadows of the tropical twilight, I saw that his comrade, too, had gone.'

It was remarkable that all six smokers should have been in difficulties with their pipes. Yet it was doubtless a sufficient reason for the general silence which prevailed—a silence which was eventually broken by the story-teller himself.

'I was specially glad to see you fellows in here,' he said, 'because I wanted to ask a question. There was no ship of ours at St. Louis or, as far as I could learn, at any other post in Senegal. How, then, came a subaltern of British Marines to be in the French colony—at the height, too, of the worst yellow fever epidemic in its history?'

The skipper slowly knocked the ashes from his pipe into the brass spitkid.

'Are you sure,' he asked curiously, 'about that double tally the poor devil mentioned?'

"Allingham-Foote"? Perfectly. The voice was very weak, it is true, but as distinct as mine is now. Besides, I had never in my life heard the name before.'

The other beckoned to the quartermaster of the watch, who was standing by the break of the poop.



'Jump down into my cabin,' he said, 'and bring me up the last mail's *Times*, which you will find on the table.'

In a few minutes the petty officer returned, and the skipper handed the paper to Occleshaw.

'Read that,' he said gravely, indicating a certain paragraph with his finger. 'I think it may help to answer your question.'

By the light of the lantern Occleshaw read as follows:—

'The Secretary of the Admiralty regrets to state that a telegram has been received from the captain of H.M.S. *Cornwall*, reporting that on the 21st of August, while on passage from Queenstown to Halifax, No. Chatham 2304 Private John Sixsmith, Royal Marines, was washed overboard when sentry on the lifebuoy. In spite of the tremendously heavy sea which was running, and which rendered the lowering of a boat impossible, Lieutenant Allingham-Foote of the same corps jumped overboard to his rescue. Both officer and man were drowned.'

Occleshaw carefully refolded the paper and returned it to its owner.

'The 21st of August was the date of my story.'

For some minutes the silence was unbroken. Then the skipper spoke.

'I am glad,' he said huskily, 'that England kept the treaty.'

## CASSERBANKER THE SECOND

BY MAJOR W. P. DRURY

MR. PAGETT, late private (and distinguished ornament) of the Royal Marine Light Infantry, leaned his arms on the top of the five-barred gate and moodily regarded the gang of convicts in the quarry below us. When the great are in contemplative vein it ill becomes the lesser ones of the earth to chatter, and I was careful not to disturb a silence that was intensified rather than broken by the cries of the moor fowl and the picks of the distant lawbreakers.

For deep thinkers (and certain railway companies) time still waits as it once did for Joshua in the past. The rest of the world had moved on twenty minutes ere Mr. Pagett shifted the position of his legs, cleared his throat, and jerked his thumb in the direction of the quarry.

'I suppose,' he ruminated, 'you don't 'appen to have any—acquaintances down yonder?'

I informed him that, as far as I knew, I could not lay claim to that distinction.

'I thought as much,' he sniffed. 'I can, though—as regards one of 'em, that is to say.'

I expressed my concern that even one of Mr. Pagett's select circle of acquaintance should have been brought to such a pass, and inquired the nature of the misfortune which had occasioned it.

He dropped his chin upon the back of his hands.

'We've heard a lot lately,' he returned, with gloom, 'of the 'Andy Man o' the Navy. The pore devil in canvas knickerpants and a tea-cosy 'at somewhere down yonder, as I used to be acquainted with, was, in his own partic'lar line, the 'andiest man in the 'ole British Fleet. So 'andy was he, in fact, that, instead o' bein' by this time an eminent parish councillor and vicar's churchwarden (same as someone else I might mention, but am too modest to), he's nothing but a barrow-trundlin', mud-coloured, arrow-stamped Number, with no more identity than the fid o' ship's biscuit his blessed back looks like. For the power an' the glory 'ave departed, and that there Ichabod o' the Prayer-book was a fool to him!'

'Everyone knows,' I murmured vaguely, 'that poor Ichabod was a

fool. But what was the particular line in which your unfortunate friend excelled?

“Andwriting. Even when he couldn’t onderstand it he would imitate it like a bloom’in’ liter’y parrot, in a manner o’ speakin’, till the writer o’ the original couldn’t swear to his own work. He began by copyin’ the commander’s tally on to a liberty ticket, and ended by signing the adm’ral’s to a cheque. His pen played him false that time, ’owever, since when—as the advertisement says—he’s used no other.”

Mr. Pagett glanced significantly in the direction of the quarry.

“He did a lot o’ fancy writin’, though, before he fell foul o’ the law; and I could tell you a many—there’s the Casserbanker story, f’rinstance. You’ll mind who Casserbanker was, of course?”

“If it were not for the seeming irrelevance,” I slowly hazarded, “I should say you were referring to the immortal boy who stood on the burn——”

“Then you’d say right—though I fail to see where the irrev’rence comes in,” growled Mr. Pagett defiantly. “’Owver, that’s neither here nor there. What I’m going to tell you is the story of Casserbanker the Second.”

He clambered to the top of the gate and seated himself where his chin had rested a moment before. After much ostentatious fumbling in his pockets he expressed the conviction that ‘it’ had been left at home on the grand pyanner; but, the omission being repaired in the usual way by the loan of *my* pouch—which, equally as usual, he retained in his possession until reminded of the fact at our parting—he lit his pipe and continued.

“One afternoon at the time o’ the last Russian scare but seven—the big one in the middle ’eighties, I mean—I was at sea in the China squadron, and the squadron was in a fog you could ’ave carved chunks out of with a cutlass. So thick was it that, during my trick on the lifebuoy (which was right aft on the quarter-deck), I could ’ardly make out the cocked-up muzzles of the after barbette guns, while the maintopmast was completely lost in the great rollin’ cloud o’ vapour. The ships were shriekin’ and moanin’ their numbers to each other on their sirens, like giant souls adrift in ’Ades, and every ’arf-hour the flagship boomed out her whereabouts at the top o’ the line with a blank charge from a six-pounder gun.

“If I were a bishop instead of a vicar’s churchwarden I should appoint a “prayer for sea room in thick weather” to be used on such occasions, though—the age o’ miracles bein’ past—it might not have inspired much confidence that partic’lar afternoon. The injins were moving dead slow, both leadsmen were in the chains, and all the

navigatin' talent in the ship was bickerin' on the chart'ouse roof. For no one could prick off our position on the chart, and, in addition to the chance of collision, there was every likeli'ood of our rammin' the Russian Tartary coast, towards which we were headin'.

'Men in a tight place nat'rally look to their commandin' orf'cer to pull them through. But, when I tell you ours was no other than Rear-Adm'ral Telfer-Bagge, you will onderstand that we might 'ave looked with equal confidence to the gilded figger'eard on the bows of his flagship. For, although upon the quarterdeck he deemed himself to rank "with—but after" the Almighty, every cook's mate in the fleet knew him for the maddest seaman outside Yarmouth Asylum, which is sayin' a good deal. And this reputation, as you may recollect, he sustained to his dyin' day. For he was the same Bagge who, afterwards in Madagascar, had himself rigged with wings and fired from a torpedo toober in the fightin' top, in order that he might cut out the French adm'ral on a political mission to Antananarivo. In doin' which he broke his silly neck.

'When, therefore, the flagship's guns presently signalled "stop injins" and "prepare to anchor instantly," the stoker off watch standin' next to me said he would be struck dead if Telfer-Bagge wasn't takin' the fleet into 'ell. Two minutes later he added that he would even go to the extreme length of bettin' sixpence on it. For, when the splash o' the adm'ral's great bower had been followed by the splashin' of eleven other anchors and by the tearin', raspin' rattle o' chain-cable through a dozen hawespipes, there rose out o' the fog all around us a fiendish din as terrifyin' as it was unexpected. It was made up of unfamiliar drum beats an' bugle calls, of clangin' church bells, and the 'um of a startled town. Then the fog lifted, and oh, my sainted aunt in tights! we knew that Telfer-Bagge had blundered a British fleet in scare time bang into the middle of the Russian port of Vladivostock!

'The panic of the garrison at our sudden appearance, 'minded me of a handful o' steel chips dropped into a nest o' soldier ants. With our glasses we could see the troops runnin' up against each other as they manned the forts, and bein' kicked by their orf'cers in the right direction and into a proper state o' zeal for their chilly and godforsaken country. Semaphores were jerkin' gibberish that utterly defeated our signalmen, and flagwaggers on bastion corners sent silly messages to each other what even I, who'd been through the Aldershot course, couldn't make 'ead or tail of. One by one the great guns o' the forts were brought to bear on the fleet, and Telfer-Bagge, who maybe was not such a fool as we thought, cleared the ships for action, and trained his guns on the forts. But though we

knew by the last mail that relations between our respectful Governments were strained almost to breakin' point, neither side was certain whether war 'ad actooally been declared. And neither side, it seemed, was wishful for to bring it about by firin' the first shot.

'As soon as the anchor 'ad been let go I had left the lifebuoy accordin' to routine (bein' no longer wanted there), fetched my rifle and baynit from below, and gone on to the fore bridge, which was my usual post in 'arbour. But soon after I got there the buglers sounded off "Action!" and I was just about to shift again to my station at the nine-point-seven when a quartermaster runs up the bridge-ladder and gives a letter to the captain. What boat brought it alongside, or why it come to us instead of to the flagship, I know no more than the blessed sabbath-breaker in the moon. But I do know that the skipper 'ad no sooner read it than he dropped it like a red-'ot penny, and roared to the bo'sun's mate to pipe "Abandon ship!"

'Only persons like me an' you, what have served in men-o'-war, can imagine the din that followed. The pipin' and cryin' of the order along the decks, the rush of the guns' crews to man the falls of the smaller boats and the guys of the big ones, the deafenin' rattle of the steam hoist, the clatter of stores dragged up ladders and flung upon the upper deck, the shoutin' of orf'cers and petty orf'cers, the echoin' squeaks o' the midshipmen, the barkin' o' the first lieutenant, and, above all the rest, the yellin' of the commander to the master-at-arms to take the name of that son of a rotten-faced onion who'd put his dirty fingers on the paintwork.

'But if we are noisier than is allowed in some navies, it's the noise of good 'omely langwidge, not the gibber of seagoin' apes; and the partic'lar job in 'and is always finished "while you wait", as the sayin' goes. In ten minutes each boat had her lamps and compass aboard, her spare gear and tools, her water an' provisions, her full complement of orf'cers and men, and was pullin' towards the adm'ral like a all-comers' race at a regatta. Every mother's son (except one 'umble 'ero) had obeyed that panickin' pipe and abandoned Her Majesty's ship to the dreadful fate which, by that time, was known to threaten her.

Mr. Pagett gazed abstractedly at the convicts, who were being marshalled by warders for the nightly shuffle back to prison.

'And the exception?' I presently murmured, realising what was expected of me.

'When the boats were a couple of 'undred yards or so from the ship,' he resumed, 'the major of Marines suddenly sings out from the pinnacle that he must go back, as the most valuable man in the 'ole of his detachment had been left behind. The skipper, not know-

in' who the absentee was, very nat'rally replied from his galley that he would not 'ave the lives of seventy 'ighly trained soldiers risked for the sake of one. But when, in common with all the ship's comp'ny, he saw who it was, he covered his face with his 'ands and burst into tears.

'For there, 'igh up on the fore bridge, his buttons, 'elmet spike, and baynit glistenin' like gold an' silver in the sunshine which 'ad dispelled the fog, was the brave fellow that everyone, fore and aft, loved. He was walkin' his post, as laid down on his order board, "in a smart and soldierlike manner," and a signalman with a glass reported that the 'ero's face was as 'appy as though he was listenin' to the chapling on a Sunday mornin'. Yet none knew better than him the dreadful danger he was in. For he'd picked up the letter the skipper had dropped on the bridge, and which turned out to be a message scribbled in pencil by the British consul ashore. "Your ship," it ran, "is anchored right atop o' the Russian mine field, though the rest o' the fleet is clear. The authorities have wired St. Petersburg to know whether war is declared. If answer is in the affirmative, they will press button and blow you all to 'Alifax." Yet, in spite of knowin' this, in spite of the tears an' entreaties of orf'cers and ship's comp'ny combined, that lion-'carted soldier refused to leave the deck, same as Casserbanker refused in the poet laureate's well-known Christmas 'ymn.'

'But the deck,' I feebly objected, 'wasn't burning.'

Mr. Pagett regarded me with a cold stare of disfavour.

'It was worse,' he retorted witheringly, 'for at any moment there might 'ave been no deck at all beneath his pore bloomin' feet. Nat'rally you're burstin' to know his tally. But, like all true 'eroes, he's a very modest man, and I'm sure he would prefer to remain anonyco gnito.'

I expressed my resolve to discover his identity nevertheless at the Admiralty or War Office.

'Then you won't succeed,' said Mr. Pagett, with conviction, 'since they've no mem'ry for mere Marines and their deeds at either instootion. But I mustn't forget to mention that there is one other brave man in the story besides the gallant 'ero who wishes to be nameless. The other was an ordin'ry seaman, great admirer of mine—of the noble Casserbanker on the bridge, I should have said.

"I can't abear it no longer," he cries, tossin' his oars, and layin' it fore and aft. "It's a sweet and gorgeous thing, as Shakespeare says, to be blowed up for one's country, but it's a lonesome death without a pal to 'old one's 'and." With which he jumps overboard in his white workin' rig, and swims to the starboard gangway.

'In vain did the 'ero on the bridge implore the brave sailor to go back and leave him to his dreadful fate—in vain did he shout that *the deck was already rumblin' beneath his pore feet. A few minutes later his gallant shipmate was beside him, shakin' sea water all over him like a big St. Laburnum dog.*

'Now, the pipe "*Abandon ship!*" and the panic-stricken rush of orf'cers and men to the boats had given the rest of the squadron a paralytic stroke, in a manner o' speakin'. Everyone stopped dead in the middle of his partic'lar job, in order to see what was 'appenin', and even the Russian soldiers 'alted without a word of command. Though no one understood exactly what it meant, all knew that the ship must be in some special danger; and when the two 'umble 'eroes were seen facin' that danger 'and in 'and, a deafenin' cheer rose to 'eaven from comrades and enemies alike.

'But—I blush to say it—there was one man out of all those applaudin' thousands who so far forgot himself as to use words what a Medway bargee would 'ave shuddered at—and that man was Rear-Adm'ral Telfer-Bagge. The thermometer was eighty-seven in the shade, yet he was stampin' up and down his after bridge as though he'd got frost-bitten toes, and his arms were workin' like those of the semaphore above him. The latter were repeatin' his orders—with the tropical words left out, and the orders were that the cheerin' should stop instantly, and that the captain should repair on board the flag-ship most instantly of all.

'What Telfer-Bagge said to him I never knew, though I afterwards asked the adm'ral's cabin-door sentry—a thoroughly trustworthy man, who could hear further through a bulkhead than most people. But there was no difficulty at all in hearin' what the skipper said to me and the ordin'ry seaman on his return, for it must 'ave been audible in the farthest Russian fort.

'As soon as he comes over the side he has both on the quarter-deck, and we not onnat'ally supposed that Telfer-Bagge had sent us at least five pounds apiece as an earnest of bigger rewards to come. But we hadn't allowed for the strange kink in every adm'ral's mind. The number was right enough, but it was five days' cells Bagge had ordered the skipper to give us, not sovereigns—five to me for not obeyin' the pipe, and five to the seaman for leavin' his blessed boat without permission.

'And while two 'umble 'eroes were drinkin' the cold water of affliction, Bagge himself drank champagne wine with the Gov'nor of Vladivostock. For, as you are aware, there was no war between Great Britain an' Russia after all.'

From the outset of Mr. Pagett's very moving narrative I had been vaguely awaiting a certain passage which I knew would prove familiar. But it came not, and the voice of the storyteller had ceased, and his chin again rested upon the topmost bar of the gate, ere the expurgated portion flashed across my mind. It was comprised in a fragment of conversation I had accidentally overheard some months before in the smoking-room of the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, and, though incomprehensible enough to me at the time, it now threw much light on the case of that cruelly misunderstood hero, Casabianca the Second.

I was sitting one morning, in the interval between two lectures, behind one of the massive columns which support the fine vaulted roof, when the doors swung open, and a couple of post-captains entered. The room being apparently empty, the great men (Heaven knows there are none greater—save admirals—beneath it) fell to badinage in a way that would have seriously jeopardised my future had I been discovered. Wherefore I took thought for the morrow, and breathed discreetly.

'Thank goodness,' said one, falling limply into an armchair, 'we've come to the end of those infernal "stink" lectures at last! Pumped-out bilge is fragrance compared with what we've produced this morning. Ring the bell, Conky, and let's have a split, for Heaven's sake!'

From his position on the hearthrug the other reached out and pressed the button. 'I once knew a man,' he observed cheerfully, 'who got typhoid from practical chemistry. He died. Why didn't you take up physics instead, like me?'

'If we are going to "International Law" at seven bells,' said the first, hastily changing the subject, 'we shall have to make an evolution of those drinks. It's ten to already, and we've got to fetch over to King William block. A split whisky and soda, waiter, and look alive with it!'

'You used to fancy yourself a bit at evolutions, eh, Nobby?'

Nobby complacently admitted that he had reason to. 'At shifting a topsail yard,' he added, 'I could wipe the eye of any first lieutenant in the Service. It was sheer downright genius.'

'The genius I've always recognised; it was the evolution I seem to have been wrong about.'

'How do you mean?'

'I thought it was "Abandon ship!"'

Nobby slowly drew a cigarette from his case and lit it.

'My dear Conky,' said he, throwing the match into the fire, 'do not be commonplace. I have been reminded of that regrettable



incident by at least forty thousand persons—mostly fools, as Carlyle would say—since its unfortunate occurrence. I was "had", I frankly admit. But I'm not the first man who has been let in by a clever forger, nor shall I be the last; and the forger in my case was clever enough to have been Beelzebub's private secretary. Anyway, here come the drinks. Chin, chin, and more originality to you!"

'Thanks, old man; but that way court-martial lies. Well, here's to the conventional "bloody war and sickly season", and may the gods ever love flag officers! By the way, you must have had an average *mauvais quart d'heure* with Telfer-Bagge after the cr—regrettable incident?'

'Damned rude I thought him, though I believe I forgot to tell him so at the time. However, I smiled a good deal a few months later when the old gentleman was eased of fifty pounds by the same son of Belial who had got me into the soup. There was a sort of poetic justice about it, which appealed to me strongly.'

'Very strongly, no doubt. But what licks me is where the rascal got his originals from. He couldn't forge without them; yet ordinary seamen don't as a rule correspond with consuls and rear-admirals, do they?'

'He had them, nevertheless. When his ditty-box was searched after the discovery of the forged cheque it was literally bursting with old envelopes and scraps of torn-up letters from half the leading people on the station.'

'How in the name of Fortune did he get hold of them?'

Nobby finished his whisky and soda, and rose from the chair.

'My dear fellow,' he said, 'you probably share with me my profound (though judiciously concealed) admiration for the Corps of Royal Marines; yet I would cheerfully get into full dress this moment to see a certain member of it hanged. When I tell you that he was one of my cabin-door sentries during that summer cruise, and that he and that forging son of Ham were as thick as thieves, you will dimly perceive how it was that my waste-paper basket overflowed into the forger's ditty-box.'

Loud and long was the laughter of Conky, the suddenly enlightened. 'I ask you,' he cried—appealing to the furniture apparently—to look at it! A post-captain, whose leg had been pulled before a British squadron and the Russian Empire by an ordinary seaman and a private of the Marines! Good Lord! Why, the whole business was a put-up job between them!'

Nobby flicked his cigarette ash into the grate. 'Conky,' said he, 'you'd be a perfect godsend to the Intelligence Department—your grasp of the obvious is so extraordinary. By the way, I owe the

Department that one, for it was the intelligence officer of the flagship (another Marine I have a grievance against) who told the admiral I was anchored at least six cables from the mine field.'

He gathered up his notebooks from the table on which he had flung them.

'My only consolation,' he continued, moving towards the door, 'is that one of the pair of rascals is still doing time for forgery.'

'And the other?'

'The other,' returned Nobby with gloom, 'was eventually discharged to pension without a scratch on his defaulter sheet, with badges up to the elbow, and wearing the good-conduct medal. But,' he added vindictively, 'I still hope for the best!'

Conky paused with his hand on the door.

'In my last junk,' he mused, 'I had a red-coated pirate who might have been twin brother to that paragon of yours. He was an irreproachable soldier, the parson's leading hand, and the biggest liar in a ship that was packed fore and aft with them.'

'What was his tally?'

'Pigott? Pockett? Packer? The name's on the tip of my tongue—anyhow, it began with P, I'll swear. Oh, of course! How the deuce did I ever forget it? It was——'

The door swung to and the name died in a murmur along the corridor.

I glanced sorrowfully at the vicar's churchwarden beside me. His face was the face of a philanthropist, and he had just finished stuffing the remainder of my 'Gold Flake' into a crevice in the wall.

'They'll be coming back from work soon,' he explained, indicating the marshalled gang in the quarry, 'and he's always the left 'and man of the rear section of fours. Many's the plug o' my baccy he's fingered out of that little 'ole by the gate. This isn't the first time by a lot that I've denied myself for the sake of a pal in trouble.'

He slipped my empty pouch into his pocket.

'If you have quite done with it——' I murmured.

'Oh! I beg your pardon, I'm sure—I was thinking of that pore fellow in the tea-cosy 'at and——'

'By-the bye,' I interrupted, 'you haven't yet told me what connection he has with the story.'

'I misremember sayin' he ever 'ad none,' retorted Mr. Pagett ambiguously.



## A SEA CHANGE

BY FRANK T. BULLEN

NIGHT was unfolding her wings over the quiet sea. Purple, dark and smooth, the circling expanse of glassy stillness met the sky rim all round in an unbroken line, like the edge of some cloud-towering plateau, inaccessible to all the rest of the world. A few lingering streaks of fading glory laced the western verge, reflecting splashes of subdued colour half-way across the circle, and occasionally catching with splendid but momentary effect the rounded shoulder of an almost imperceptible swell. Their departure was being noted with wistful eyes by a little company of men and one woman, who, without haste and a hushed solemnity as of mourners at the burial of a dear one, were leaving their vessel and bestowing themselves in a small boat which lay almost motionless alongside. There was no need for haste, for the situation had been long developing. The brig was an old one, whose owner was poor and unable to spare sufficient from her scanty earnings for her proper upkeep. So she had been gradually going from bad to worse, not having been strongly built of hard wood at first, but pinned together hastily by some farmer-shipbuilder-fisherman up the Bay of Fundy, mortgaged strake by strake, like a suburban villa, and finally sold by auction for the price of timber in her. Still, being a smart model and newly painted, she looked rather attractive when Captain South first saw her lying in lonely dignity at an otherwise deserted quay in the St. Katherine's Docks. Poor man, the command of her meant so much to him. Long out of employment, friendless and poor, he had invested a tiny legacy, just fallen to his wife, in the vessel as the only means whereby he could obtain command of even such a poor specimen of a vessel as the *Dorothea*. And the shrewd old man who owned her drove a hard bargain. For the small privilege of the skipper carrying his wife with him 50s. per month was deducted from the scanty wage at first agreed upon. But in spite of these drawbacks the anxious master felt a pleasant glow of satisfaction thrill him as he thought that soon he would be once more afloat, the monarch of his tiny realm, and free for several peaceful months from the harassing uncertainties of shore-life.

In order to avoid expense he lived on board while in dock, and made himself happily busy rigging up all sorts of cunning additions to the little cuddy, with an eye to the comfort of his wife. While thus engaged came a thunderclap, the first piece of bad news. The *Dorothea* was chartered to carry a cargo of railway iron and machinery to Buenos Ayres. Had he been going alone the thing would have annoyed him, but he would have got over that with a good old-fashioned British growl or so. But with Mary on board—the thought was paralysing. For there is only one cargo that tries a ship more than railway metal, copper ore badly stowed. Its effect upon a staunch steel-built ship is to make her motion abominable—to take all the sea-kindness out of her. A wooden vessel, even of the best build, burdened with those rigid lengths of solid metal, is like a living creature on the rack, in spite of the most careful stowage. Every timber in her complains, every bend and strake is wrenched and strained, so that, be her record for 'tightness' never so good, one ordinary gale will make frequent exercise at the pump an established institution. And Captain South already knew that the *Dorothea* was far from being staunch and well-built, although, happily for his small remaining peace of mind, he did not know how walty and unseaworthy she really was. A few minutes' bitter meditation, over this latest crook in his lot, and the man in him rose to the occasion, determined to make the best of it and hope steadily for a fine run into the trades. He superintended her stowing himself, much to the disgust of the stevedores, who are never over particular unless closely watched, although so much depends upon the way their work is done. At any rate, he had the satisfaction of knowing that the ugly stuff was as handsomely bestowed as experience could suggest, and, with a sigh of relief, he saw the main hatches put on and battened down for a full due.

In the selection of his crew he had been unusually careful. Five A.B's were all that he was allowed, the vessel being only 500 tons burden, two officers besides himself, and one man for the double function of cook and steward. Therefore, he sought to secure the best possible according to his judgment, and really succeeded in getting together a sturdy little band. His chief comfort, however, was in his second mate, who was a Finn—one of that phlegmatic race from the eastern shore of the Baltic who seem to inherit not only a natural aptitude for a sea life, but also the ability to build ships, make sails and rigging, do blacksmithing, &c.—all, in fact, that there is to a ship, as our cousins say. Slow, but reliable to the core, and a perfect godsend in a small ship. In Olaf Svensen, then, the skipper felt he had a tower of strength. The mate was a young Londoner,

smart and trustworthy—not too independent to thrust his arms into the tarpot when necessary, and amiable withal. The other six members of the crew—two Englishmen and three Scandinavians—were good seamen, all sailors—there wasn't a steamboat man among them—and, from the first day when in the dock they all arrived sober and ready for work, matters went smoothly and salt-water fashion.

It was late in October when they sailed, and they had no sooner been cast adrift by the grimy little 'jackal' that towed them down to the Nore than they were greeted by a bitter nor'-wester that gave them a sorry time of it getting round the Foreland. The short, vicious Channel sea made the loosely-knit frame of the brig sing a mournful song as she jumped at it, braced sharp up, and many were the ominous remarks exchanged in the close, wedge-shaped fo'-c's'le on her behaviour in these comparatively smooth waters, coupled with gloomy speculations as to what sort of a fist she would make of the Western Ocean waves presently. Clinkety-clank, bang, bang went the pumps for fifteen minutes out of every two hours, the water rising clear, as though drawn from overside, and a deeper shade settled on the skipper's brow. For a merry fourteen days they fought their way inch by inch down Channel, getting their first slant between Ushant and Scilly in the shape of a hard nor'-easter, that drove them clear of the land and 300 miles out into the Atlantic. Then it fell a calm, with a golden haze all round the horizon by day, and a sweet, balmy feel in the air—a touch of Indian summer on the sea. Three days it lasted—days that brought no comfort to the skipper, who could hardly hold his patience when his wife blessed the lovely weather, in her happy ignorance of what might be expected as the price presently to be paid for it. Then one evening there began to rise in the west the familiar sign so dear to homeward-bounders, so dreaded by outward-going ships—the dense dome of cloud uplifted to receive the setting sun. The skipper watched its growth as if fascinated by the sight, watched it until at midnight it had risen to be a vast convex screen, hiding one-half of the deep blue sky. At the changing of the watch he had her shortened down to the two lower topsails and fore-topmast staysail, and having thus snuggled her, went below to snatch, fully dressed, a few minutes' sleep. The first moaning breath of the coming gale roused him almost as soon as it reached the ship, and as the watchful Svensen gave his first order, 'Lee fore brace!' the skipper appeared at the companion hatch, peering anxiously to windward, where the centre of that gloomy veil seemed to be worn thin. The only light left was just a little segment of blue low down on the eastern horizon, to which, in spite of themselves, the eyes of the travelling watch turned wistfully. But

whatever shape the surging thoughts may take in the minds of seamen, the exertion of the moment effectually prevents any development of them into despair in the case of our own countrymen. So, in obedience to the hoarse cries of Mr. Svensen, they strove to get the *Dorothea* into that position where she would be best able to stem the rising sea, and fore-reach over the hissing sullenness of the long, creaming rollers, that as they came surging past swept her, a mile at a blow, sideways to leeward, leaving a whirling, broadside wake of curling eddies. Silent and anxious, Captain South hung with one elbow over the edge of the companion, his keen hearing taking note of every complaint made by the trembling timbers beneath his feet, whose querulous voices permeated the deeper note of the storm.

All that his long experience could suggest for the safety of his vessel was put into practice. One by one the scanty show of sail was taken in and secured with extra gasket turns, lest any of them should, showing a loose corner, be ripped adrift by the snarling tempest. By eight bells (4 A.M.) the brig showed nothing to the bleak darkness above but the two gaunt masts, with their ten bare yards tightly braced up against the lee backstays, and the long peaked forefinger of the jibboom reaching out over the pale foam. A tiny weather-cloth of canvas only a yard square was stopped in the weather main rigging, its small area amply sufficing to keep the brig's head up in the wind except when, momentarily becalmed by a hill of black water rearing its head to windward, it relaxed its steadfast thrust and suffered the vessel to fall off helplessly into the trough between two huge waves. Now commenced the long unequal struggle between a weakly-constructed hull, unfairly handicapped by the wrench of a dead mass of iron within that met every natural scend of her frame with unyielding brutality of resistance, and the wise old sea, kindly indeed to ships whose construction and cargo enables them to meet its masses with the easy grace of its own inhabitants, but pitiless destroyers of all vessels that do not greet its curving assault with yielding grace, its mighty stride with sinuous deference of retreat. The useless wheel, held almost hard down, thumped slowly under the hands of the listless helmsman with the regularity of a nearly worn-out clock, while the oakum began to bulge upward from the deck seams. As if weary even unto death, the brig cowered before the untiring onslaught of the waves, allowing them to rise high above the weather rail, and break apart with terrible uproar, filling the decks rail-high from poop to forecastle. Pumping was incessant, yet Svensen found each time he dropped the slender sounding-rod down the tube a longer wetness upon it, until its two feet became insufficient, and the mark of doom crept up the line. And besides the

ever-increasing inlet of the sea, men stayed by the pumps only at imminent risk of being dashed to pieces, for they were, as always, situated in the middle of the main deck, where the heaviest seas usually break aboard. There was little said, and but few looks exchanged. The skipper had, indeed, to meet the wan face of his wife, but she dared not put her fear into words, or he bring himself to tell her that except for a miracle their case was hopeless. He seldom left the deck, as if the wide grey hopelessness around had an irresistible fascination for him, and he watched with unspeculative eyes the pretty gambols of those tiny elves of the sea, the Mother Carey's chickens, as they fluttered incessantly to and fro across the wake of his groaning vessel.

So passed a night and a day of such length that the ceaseless tumult of wind and wave had become normal, and slighter sounds could be easily distinguished because the ear had become attuned to the elemental din. Unobtrusively the impassive Svensen had been preparing their only serviceable boat by stocking her with food, water, &c. The skipper had watched him with a dull eye, as if his proceedings were devoid of interest, but felt a glimmer of satisfaction at the evidence of his second mate's forethought. For all hope of the *Dorothea's* weathering the gale was now completely gone. Even the blue patches breaking through the heavy cloud-pall to leeward could not revive it. For she was now only wallowing, with a muffled roar of turbid water within as it sullenly swept from side to side with the sinking vessel's heavy roll. The gale died away peacefully, the sea smoothed its wrinkled plain, and the grave stars peered out one by one, as if to reassure the anxious watchers. Midnight brought a calm, as deep as if wind had not yet been made, but the old swell still came marching on, making the doomed brig heave clumsily as it passed her. The day broke in perfect splendour, cloudless and pure, the wide heavens bared their solemn emptiness, and the glowing sun in lonely glory showered such radiance on the sea that it blazed with a myriad dazzling hues. But into that solitary circle, whereof the brig was the pathetic centre, came no friendly glint of sails, no welcome strain of trailing smoke across the clear blue. But the benevolent calm gave opportunity for a careful launching of the boat, and as she lay quietly alongside the few finishing touches were given to her equipment. As the sun went down the vessel's motion ceased—she was now nearly level with the smooth surface of the ocean, which impassively awaited her farewell to the light. Hardly a word was spoken as the little company left her side and entered the boat. When all were safely bestowed the skipper said, 'Cut that painter forrard there,' and his voice sounded hollowly



across the burdening silence. A few faint splashes were heard as the oars rose and fell, and the boat glided away. At a cable's length they ceased pulling, and with every eye turned upon the brig they waited. In a painful, strained hush, they saw her bow as if in stately adieu, and as if with an embrace the placid sea enfolded her. Silently she disappeared, the dim outlines of her spars lingering, as if loth to leave, against the deepening violet of the night.

With one arm around his wife, the skipper sat at the tiller, a small compass before him, by the aid of which he kept her head toward Madeira, but, anxious to husband energy, he warned his men not to pull too strenuously. Very peacefully passed the night, no sound invading the stillness except the regular plash of the oars and an occasional querulous cry from a belated sea-bird aroused from its sleep by the passage of the boat. At dawn rowing ceased for a time, and those who were awake watched in a perfect silence, such as no other situation upon this planet can afford, the entry of the new day. Not one of them but felt like men strangely separated from mundane things, and face to face with the inexpressible mysteries of the timeless state. But it was Svensen who broke that scared quiet by a sonorous shout of 'Sail-ho!' With a transition like a wrench from death to life, all started into eager questioning; and all presently saw, with the vigilant Finn, the unmistakable outlines of a vessel branded upon the broad, bright semi-circle of the half-risen sun. No order was given or needed. Double-banked, the oars gripped the water, and with a steady rush the boat sped eastward towards that beatific vision of salvation. Even the skipper's face lost its dull shade of hopelessness, in spite of his loss, as he saw the haggard lines relax from Mary's face. Quite a cheerful buzz of chat arose. Unweariedly, hour after hour, the boat sped onward over the bright smoothness, though the sun poured down his stores of heat and the sweat ran in steamy streams down the brick-red faces of the toiling rowers. After four hours of unremitting labour they were near enough to their goal to see that she was a steamer lying still, with no trace of smoke from her funnel. As they drew nearer they saw that she had a heavy list to port, and presently came the suggestion that she was deserted. Hopes began to rise, visions of recompense for all their labour beyond anything they could have ever dreamed possible. The skipper's nostrils dilated, and a faint blush rose to his cheeks. Weariness was forgotten, and the oars rose and fell as if driven by steam, until, panting and breathless, they rounded to under the stern of a schooner-rigged steamer of about 2000 tons burden, without a boat in her davits, and her lee rail nearly at the water's edge. Running alongside, a rope trailing overboard was caught, and the boat made fast. In two

minutes every man but the skipper was on board, and a purchase was being rigged for the shipment of Mrs. South. No sooner was she also in safety than investigation commenced. The discovery was soon made that, although the decks had been swept and the cargo evidently shifted, there was nothing wrong with the engines or boilers except that there was a good deal of water in the stokehold. She was evidently Italian by her name, without the addition of Genoa, the *Luigi C.*, being painted on the harness casks and buckets, and her crew must have deserted her in a sudden panic.

Like men intoxicated, they toiled to get things shipshape on board their prize, hardly pausing for sleep or food. And when they found the engines throbbing beneath their feet they were almost delirious with joy. Opening the hatches, they found that the cargo of grain had shifted, but not beyond their ability to trim, so they went at it with the same savage vigour they had manifested ever since they first flung themselves on board. And when, after five days of almost incessant labour, they took the pilot off Dungeness, and steamed up the Thames to London again, not one of them gave a second thought to the hapless *Dorothea*. Twelve thousand pounds were divided among them by the Judge's orders, and Captain South found himself able to command a magnificent cargo steamer of more than 3000 tons register before he was a month older.



## AT SEA

BY GUY DE MAUPASSANT

THE following paragraph recently appeared in the press:

*'Boulogne-sur-Mer, January 22nd: from our correspondent:*

*'There is consternation among the sea-faring community here, which has been so hard hit during the last two years, at a frightful tragedy a few days ago. The fishing-boat commanded by Captain Javel was driven too far to the west, as it was coming into port, and foundered on the rocks of the breakwater protecting the pier. In spite of the efforts of the lifeboat and the use of the rocket apparatus, four men and the cabin-boy lost their lives. The bad weather continues. Further disasters are feared.'*

I wonder who this Captain Javel is. Is he the brother of the one-armed Javel?

If the poor fellow who was washed overboard and now lies dead, perhaps under the wreck of his shattered vessel, is the man I am thinking of, he was involved, eighteen years ago, in another tragedy, terrifying, yet simple, like all the tragedies of the deep.

At that time the elder Javel was skipper of a trawler.

The trawler is the best type of fishing-boat. Strongly built to face any weather, and broad in the beam, she is always tossing about on the waves, like a cork; at sea all the time, continually lashed by the heavy, salt-laden Channel gales, she combs the sea tirelessly, with all sail set, dragging over the side a great net, which scours the ocean-bed, sweeping off and bringing up all the creatures that lurk in the rocks—flat fish clinging to the sand, heavy crabs with crooked claws and lobsters with pointed whiskers.

When the breeze is fresh and the water choppy, fishing starts. The net is attached along the whole length of a pole cased in iron, which is lowered by means of two cables working on two windlasses fore and aft. And the boat, drifting to leeward with wind and tide, drags along with her this device for stripping and ransacking the sea-bed.

Javel had his younger brother on board, with a crew of four and a

cabin-boy. He had sailed from Boulogne in fine, clear weather to go trawling.

Soon the wind got up and, increasing to gale force, compelled the trawler to run before it. She reached the English coast, but mountainous seas were lashing the cliffs and pounding the beaches, so that it was impossible to come alongside the piers, the approaches to the harbours being dangerous with flying foam and roaring waves.

The trawler put about once more, rising to the rollers, tossed, battered, drenched with spray, buffeted with deluges of water, but undismayed in spite of everything, for she was accustomed to this sort of heavy weather, which sometimes kept her at sea for five or six days between the two neighbouring countries, unable to make harbour in either.

At last the gale dropped, while she was still some distance out, and, though it was still rough, the skipper ordered the trawl-net to be put down.

So the great net was heaved over the side, and two men forward and two in the stern began to let the cables holding it run out over the windlasses. Suddenly it touched bottom, but, as a huge wave made the boat heel over, the younger Javel, who happened to be forward superintending the paying out of the rope, staggered, and his arm got caught between the cable, momentarily slackened by the heeling of the boat, and the wood of the gunwhale over which it passed. He made a desperate effort, trying to raise the rope with his other hand, but the net was already drawing and the tightened cable would not give.

The man cried out in pain. Everyone ran to his help. His brother left the tiller. They tugged at the rope in an attempt to free the limb, which was being crushed. It was useless.

'We must cut it,' said one of the sailors, taking from his pocket a large knife, two slashes of which could have saved the younger Javel's arm.

But cutting the cable meant losing the net, and the net was worth money, a great deal of money—fifteen hundred francs; and it was the property of the elder Javel, with whom having was keeping.

In an agony of anxiety he shouted: 'No! don't cut it; wait a moment; I'll bring her head up into the wind.' And he ran to the tiller and put it hard over.

The boat hardly answered the helm, hampered as she was by the net, which checked her way, and there was also the drag of drift and wind.

The younger Javel had fallen to his knees, with clenched teeth and haggard eyes. He did not say a word.

His brother came back, still afraid that one of the sailors would use his knife. 'Wait, wait, don't cut, we'll cast anchor.'

The anchor was let go, and the whole length of the chain paid out. Then they began to heave at the capstan to slacken the cables of the net. At last the rope relaxed, and the arm, now useless inside the sleeve of the bloodstained jersey, was freed.

The younger Javel seemed dazed. They took off his jersey, revealing a ghastly sight—a mass of pulped flesh, from which blood was spurting as if under the action of a pump. The man looked at his arm and murmured: 'Buggered!'

As the hæmorrhage was making a pool on the deck, one of the crew cried: 'He'll bleed to death; the artery must be tied.'

So they took a piece of coarse, brown, tarred string and, putting it round the limb above the wound, they pulled it tight with all their force. The flow of blood gradually lessened and finally stopped altogether.

The younger Javel got up, with the arm hanging limp at his side. He took hold of it with the other hand, raised it, turned it round and shook it. Everything was broken, all the bones shattered; it was only joined to the shoulder by the muscles. He examined it sadly and thoughtfully. Then he sat down on a furled sail, and his comrades advised him to bathe the place to prevent gangrene.

They put a bucket near him, and every few minutes he filled a glass with water and bathed the ghastly wound, letting a trickle of fresh water run over it.

'You'd be more comfortable below,' said his brother.

He went below, but came up again an hour later, not liking to be alone. Besides, he preferred the fresh air. He sat down on the sail again and went on bathing his arm.

They were having a good catch. The broad, white-bellied fish were lying about near him, wriggling in their death-throes. He kept his eyes on them, bathing his crushed limb all the time.

As they were just getting back to Boulogne, the wind got up again suddenly; and the little vessel began her mad career once more, pitching and tossing, jarring the poor fellow's injured arm.

Night came on. The weather remained dirty till dawn. When the sun rose, England was in sight, but, as the sea was going down, they set course back for France, beating up against the wind.

Towards evening the younger Javel called his comrades and showed them ugly-looking black marks, where mortification of the mangled portions of the limb was setting in.

The sailors examined it, giving their advice.

'It looks precious like gangrene,' opined one.

'You'd better put salt water on it,' declared another.

So they brought salt water and poured it over the wound. The injured man turned green, ground his teeth and flinched a little; but he did not cry out.

When the smarting ceased, he said to his brother: 'Give me your knife.' His brother handed him the knife. 'Now hold my arm out straight and keep it stretched.'

They did as he asked.

Then he began carving his own flesh. He worked quietly, reflectively, severing the last tendons with the razor-edged blade; and soon there was only the stump left. He uttered a deep sigh and declared: 'It was the only thing to do; I was buggered.'

He seemed relieved, and was breathing heavily, as he resumed his bathing of the stump.

The night was rough again and they could not make land.

When daylight appeared, the younger Javel picked up his severed arm and scrutinized it carefully. Putrefaction was setting in. His comrades also came to examine it; they passed it round from hand to hand, felt it, turned it over and sniffed it.

His brother said: 'You'd better throw it overboard now.'

But the younger Javel fired up at that: 'No, I won't! It's mine, I'd have you know; it's my arm, after all.'

He picked it up again and put it between his legs.

'That won't prevent it putrefying,' said the elder brother.

The injured man had an inspiration. When they were long at sea, they used to pack the fish in barrels of salt to preserve them.

He asked: 'I suppose I couldn't put it into brine?'

'That's an idea,' declared the others.

So they emptied one of the barrels which had been filled with the last few days' catch; and they put the arm at the bottom. They heaped salt on the top of it and replaced the fish one by one.

One of the sailors made a joke about it: 'We must take care not to sell it at the auction.'

And everyone laughed except the two Javels.

The wind was still high. They tacked about in sight of Boulogne till ten o'clock the next morning. The injured man went on bathing his arm.

At intervals he got up and walked from one end of the boat to the other. His brother at the tiller watched him, shaking his head.

At last they made the harbour.

The doctor examined the wound and pronounced it quite healthy. He dressed it carefully and ordered rest. But Javel refused to go to bed till he had recovered his arm, and went back as quickly as he

could to the harbour to find the barrel, which had been marked with a cross.

They emptied it in his presence, and he picked up his arm, perfectly preserved in the brine, wrinkled, but free from putrefaction. He wrapped it up in a cloth which he had brought for the purpose and went home.

His wife and children carefully examined father's severed arm, feeling the fingers and removing the grains of salt from the nails; then they sent for the joiner to make a miniature coffin.

Next day the whole crew of the trawler followed the funeral of the severed limb. The two brothers, side by side, headed the procession. The parish sexton carried the coffin under one arm.

The younger Javel gave up the sea. He got a small job at the port, and whenever he talked about the accident later, he would add in a confidential whisper: 'If my brother had been willing to cut the trawl rope, of course, I should still have my arm. But with him having's keeping.'





## 'T' WIND'ARD!

BY CAPTAIN DAVID BONE

FOR over a week of strong westerly gales we had kept the open sea, steering to the north as best the wind allowed. A lull had come—a break in the furious succession, though still the sea ran high—and the Old Man, in part satisfied that he had made his northing, put the helm up and squared away for the land. In this he was largely prompted by the coasting pilot (sick of a long unprofitable passage—on a 'lump-sum' basis), who confidently asked to be shown but one speck of Irish land, and, 'I'll tell 'oo the road t' Dub-lin, Capt'in!'

Moderately clear at first, but thickening later, as we closed the land, it was not the weather for running in on a dangerous coast, ill-lighted and unmarked, but, had we waited for clear weather, we might have marked time to the westward until the roses came; the wind was fair, we were over-long on our voyage; sheet and brace and wind in square sail thrummed a homeward song for us as we came in from the west.

At close of a day of keen sailing, the outposts of the Irish coast, bleak, barren, inhospitable, lay under our lee—a few bold rocks, around and above wreathed in sea-mist, and the never-dying Atlantic swell breaking heavily at base.

'Iss, indeed, Capt'in! The Stags! The Stags of Broad-haven I tell 'oo,' said the pilot, scanning through his glasses with an easy assurance. 'Indeed to goodness, it iss the best landfall I haf ever seen, Capt'in!'

Though pleased with his navigation, the Old Man kept his head. 'Aye, aye,' he said. 'The Stags, eh? Well, we'll haul up t' th' wind anyway—t' make sure!' He gave the order, and went below to his charts.

Rolling heavily, broad to the sea and swell, we lay awhile. There was no sign of the weather clearing, no lift in the grey mist that hung dense over the rugged coast-line. On deck again, the Old Man stared long and earnestly at the rocky islets, seeking a further guide-mark. In the waning daylight they were fast losing shape and colour. Only the breaking sea, white and sightly, marked them bold in the grey mist-laden breath of the Atlantic. 'Present themselves, consisting

of four high rocky islets of from two thirty-three ought-six feet in height, an' steep-to,' he said, reading from a book of sailing directions. 'Dammel! I can only see three.' To the pilot, 'D'ye know the Stags well, Mister? Are ye sure of ye're ground?'

'Well, well. Indeed, Capt'in' (Mr. Williams laughed). 'I know the Stags, yess! Ass well ass I know Car-narvon! The Stags of Broadhaven, I tell 'oo. When I wass master of the *Ann Pritchard*, of Beaumaris, it wass always to the West of Ireland we would be goin'. Summer and winter, three years, I tell 'oo, before I came to pilotin', an' there iss not many places between the Hull and Missen Head that I haf nor seen in daylight an' dark. It iss the Stags, indeed! East, south-east now, Capt'in, an' a fine run to Sligo Bar!'

Still unassured, the Old Man turned his glasses on the rocky group. 'One—two—three—perhaps that was the fourth just open to the southard'—they certainly tallied with the description in the book—'high, steep-to.' A cast of lead brought no decision. Forty-seven! He might be ten miles north and south by that and former soundings. It was rapidly growing dark, the wind freshening. If he did not set course by the rocks—Stags they might be—he would lose all benefit of landfall—would spend another week or more to the westward waiting for a rare slant on this coast of mist and foul weather! Already eighteen days from Falmouth! The chance of running in was tempting! Hesitating, uncertain, he took a step or two up and down the poop, halting at turns to stare anxiously at the rocks, in the wind's eye, at the great Atlantic combers welling up and lifting the barque to leeward at every rise. On the skylight sat Mr. Williams, smiling and clucking in his beard that 'he did not know the Stags, indeed!'

'We haul off, Pilot,' said stout Old Jock, coming at a decision. 'If it had been daylight . . . perhaps . . . but I'm for takin' no risks. They may be th'Stags, belike they are, but I'm no' goin' oan in weather like this! We'll stand out t' th' norrard—"mainyards forward, Mister"—till daylight anyway!'

Sulkily we hauled the yards forward and trimmed sails, leaving the rocks to fade under curtain of advancing night, our high hopes of making port dismissed. The 'navigators' among us were loud of their growling, as the ship lurched and wallowed in the trough of the sea, the decks waist-high with a wash of icy water—a change from the steadiness and comfort of a running ship.

Night fell black dark. The moon not risen to set a boundary to sea and sky; no play of high light on the waste of heaving water; naught but the long inky ridges, rolling out of the west, that, lifting giddily to crest, sent us reeling into the windless trough. On the poop the Old Man and Pilot tramped fore and aft, talking together of

landfalls and coasting affairs. As they came and went, snatches of their talk were borne to us, the watch on deck—sheltering from the weather at the break. The Old Man's 'Aye, ayes,' and 'Goad, man's,' and the voluble Welshman's 'Iss, indeed, Capt'in,' and 'I tell 'oo's.' The Pilot was laying off a former course of action. "' . . . Mister Williams," he said, "I can see that 'oo knows th' coast," he said, "an' . . . I 'oodn't go in myself," he said; "but if 'oo are sure——"' 'Brea-kers a-head!'—a stunning period to his tale, came in a long shout, a scream almost, from the look-out!

Both sprang to the lee rigging, handing their eyes to shield the wind and spray. Faint as yet against the sombre monotone of sea and sky, a long line of breaking water leapt to their gaze, then vanished, as the staggering barque drove to the trough; again—again, there could be no doubt. Breakers! On a lee shore!!

'Mawdredd an'll, O Christ! The Stags, Capt'in . . . My God! My God!' Wholly unmanned, muttering in Welsh and English, Mr. Williams ran to the compass to take bearings.

Old Jock came out of the rigging. Then, in a steady voice, more ominous than a string of oaths, 'Luff! Down helm m'lad, an' keep her close!' And to the Pilot, 'Well? What d'ye make of it, Mister?'

'Stags, Capt'in! *Diwedd* i! That I should be mistake . . . The others . . . God knows! . . . If it iss the Stags, Capt'in . . . the passage t'th' suth'ard . . . I know it . . . we can run . . . if it iss the Stags, Capt'in!'

'An' if it's no' th' Stags! M' Goad! Hoo many Stags d'ye know, Mister? No! No! We'll keep th' sea, if she can weather thae rocks . . . and if she canna!' A mute gesture—then passionately, 'T'hell wi' you an' yer b—y Stags: I back ma ship against a worthless pilot! All hands, there, Mister—mains'l an' to'gain's'l oan her! Up, ye hounds; up, if ye look for dry berryin'!'

All hands! No need for a call! 'Breakers ahead!'—the words that sent us racing to the yards, to out knife and whip at the gaskets that held our saving power in leash. Quickly done, the great mainsail blew out, thrashing furiously till steadied by tack and sheet. Then topgal'n'sail, the spars buckling to overstrain; staysail, spanker—never was canvas crowded on a ship at such a pace; a mighty fear at our hearts that only frenzied action could allay.

Shuddering, she lay down to it, the lee rail entirely awash, the decks canted at a fearsome angle; then righted—a swift, vicious lurch, and her head sweeping wildly to windward till checked by the heaving helmsman. The wind that we had thought moderate when running before it now held at half a gale. To that she might have stood weatherly, but the great western swell—spawn of uncounted gales—was matche'd against her, rolling up to check the windward snatches

and sending her reeling to leeward in a smother of foam and broken water.

A gallant fight! At the weather gangway stood Old Jock, legs apart and sturdy, talking to his ship.

'Stand, good spars,' he would say, casting longing eyes aloft. Or, patting the taffrail with his great sailor hands, 'Up tae it, ye bitch! Up!! Up!!' as, raising her head, streaming in cascade from a sail-pressed plunge, she turned to meet the next great wall of water that set against her. 'She'll stand it, Mister,' to the Mate at his side. 'She'll stand it, an' the head gear holds. If she starts that!'—he turned his palms out—'If she starts th' head gear, Mister!'

'They'll hold, Sir! . . . good gear,' answered the Mate, hugging himself at thought of the new landyards, the stout Europe gammon lashings, he had rove off when the boom was rigged. Now was the time when Sanny Armstrong's spars would be put to the test. The relic of the ill-fated *Glenisla* now a shapely to'gallant mast, was bending like a whip! 'Good iron,' he shouted as the backstays twanged a high note of utmost stress.

Struggling across the heaving deck, the Pilot joined the group. Brokenly, shouting down the wind, 'She'll never do it, Capt'in, I tell 'oo! . . . An' th' tide . . . Try th' south passage . . . Stags, sure! . . . See them fair now! . . . Th' south passage, Capt'in . . . It iss some years, indeed, but . . . I know. *Diwedd an' ll*. She'll never weather it, Capt'in!'

'Aye . . . and weather it . . . an' the gear holds! Goad, man! Are ye sailor enough t' know what'll happen if Ah start a brace, wi' this press o' sail oan her? T' wind'ard . . . she goes. Ne'er failed me yet!—a mute caress of the stout taffrail, a slap of his great hand. 'Into it, ye bitch! T' wind'ard! T' wind'ard!'

Staggering, taking the shock and onset of the relentless seas, but ever turning the haughty face of her anew to seek the wind, she struggled on, nearing the cruel rocks and their curtain of hurtling breakers. Timely, the moon rose, herself invisible, but shedding a diffused light in the east, showing the high summits of the rocks, up-reared above the blinding spindrift. A low moaning boom broke on our strained ears, turning to the hoarse roar of tortured waters as we drew on.

'How does't bear noo, M'Kellar? Is she makin' oan't?' shouted the Old Man.

The second Mate, at the binnacle, sighted across the wildly swinging compass card. 'No' sure, Sir, . . . Th' caird swingin' . . . think there's hauf a p'int . . . Hauf a p'int, onyway!'

'Half a p'int!' A great comber upreared and struck a deep re-

sounding blow—'That for yeer half a p'int'—as her head swung wildly off—off, till the stout spanker, the windward driver, straining at the stern sheets, drove her anew to a seaward course.

Nearer, but a mile off, the rocks plain in a shaft of breaking moonlight.

'How now, M'Kellar?'

'Nae change, Sir! . . . 'bout east, nor'-east . . . deefecult . . . the caird swingin' . . .'

The Old Man left his post and struggled to the binnacle. 'East, nor'-east . . . east o' that, mebbe,' he muttered. Then to 'Dutchy' at the weather helm, 'Full, m'lad! Keep 'er full an' nae mair! Goad, man! Steer as ye never steered . . . th' wind's yer mairk . . . Goad! D'na shake her!'

Grasping the binnacle to steady himself against the wild lurches of the staggering hull, the Old Man stared steadily aloft, unheeding the roar and crash of the breakers, now loud over all—eyes only for the straining canvas and standing spars above him.

'She's drawin' ahead, Sir,' shouted M'Kellar, tense, excited. 'East, b'nor. . . . an' fast!'

The Old Man raised a warning hand to the steersman. 'Nae higher! Nae higher! Goad, man! Dinna let 'r gripe!'

Dread suspense! Would she clear? A narrow lane of open water lay clear of the bow—broadening as we sped on.

'Nae higher! Nae higher! Aff! Aff! Up hellum, up!' His voice a scream the Old Man turned to bear a frantic heave on the spokes.

Obedient to the helm and the Mate's ready hand at the driver sheets, she flew off, free of the wind and sea—tearing past the towering rocks, a cable's length to leeward. Shock upon shock, the great Atlantic sea broke and shattered and fell back from the scarred granite face of the outmost Stag; a seething maelstrom of tortured waters, roaring, crashing, shrilling into the deep, jagged fissures—a shriek of Furies bereft. And, high above the tumult of the waters and the loud, glad cries of us, the hoarse, choking voice of the man who had backed his ship.

'Done it, ye bitch!'—and now a trembling hand at his old grey head. 'Done it! Weathered—by Goad!'



# THE PLEASURE OF THEIR COMPANY

BY BARTIMEUS

## I

BECAUSE it was a make-and-mend \* afternoon and he had just recovered from a touch of dengue fever, the officer of the day reclined in a deck-chair on the quarter-deck. A book rested on his knees, face downwards: it was intended by the occupant of the chair to be taken, in conjunction with the telescope that lay on the deck beside him, as a symbol of alertness and mental activity. Actually his eyes were closed.

The quartermaster and the side-boy paced the deck by the port gangway, side by side, their hands clasped behind their backs: eight slow paces forward and eight slow paces aft, their eyes on the lines of caulking, sticky in the heat of a tropical afternoon. The quartermaster was telling the side-boy about tripe. The side-boy thought it was a marine growth and disdained it as an article of diet. The quartermaster said, on the contrary, it came out of cows and was a nourishing and tasty supper, particularly when cooked by his mother. They talked in undertones as a concession to the alertness of the figure in the deck-chair and the atmosphere of drowsy peace that brooded over the decks forward, where the ship's company lay outstretched under the awnings in deep repose.

The second-in-command of the cruiser stepped out of his cabin and sauntered aft. The officer of the day, whose name was Ware, raised one eyelid and smiled at him. The quartermaster changed the conversation from tripe to the intricacies of laying out a kedgie anchor from a cutter, raising his voice slightly to make it clear that he was engaged in the task of edifying the mind of youth. The Commander sat down on the grating that covered the after-capstan, tilted his cap over his eyes and yawned. 'Too hot even to sleep,' he observed querulously. The officer of the day supposed that it was, even for those at leisure to do so. A little incongruous, he felt, having regard to the season of the year. New Year's Eve, in fact.

The Naval equivalent of a half-holiday.



'So it is,' muttered the Commander. 'Then you'll jolly well strike sixteen bells at midnight. You are the youngest officer on board, aren't you?'

Ware drowsily supposed he was, and added that he thought the custom an obsolete and superfluous one, as he had hoped to be turned in and asleep by midnight. He picked up the telescope and levelled it at one of the ship's whalers lying becalmed to seaward, her mainsail throwing a long pearl-white reflection on the smooth surface of the water. A few cables away from her a triangular beacon rose out of the sea, stark and black against the gleaming shimmer that stretched, unbroken by any other object, to the horizon.

'Not much wind for sailing. They went away to troll for amber jack off the beacon.'

'Who went fishing?'

'Norris and Picton and the Pay.'

The Commander studied the limp folds of the ensign hanging motionless beneath the awning. 'They'll get a breeze presently when the sun gets lower. I'd rather be becalmed in the whaler than up-country with the skipper's party.'

He turned a little on the capstan and stared under his cap-peak at the grey-green expanse of mangrove swamps that rolled away from the edge of the bay, where the cruiser lay at anchor, to the mountain ranges towering behind the other into the unmapped interior. At the head of the bay a jetty and a cluster of corrugated-iron buildings marked the rail-head.

'I went ashore yesterday to try and get a walk, but there's nowhere to walk—just a clearing with the railway head and the ware-houses of the World Wide Fruit Company: the rest is swamp and jungle. The manager told me he'd been there five years. Five years of fever and mosquitoes. There are banana plantations all the way up the line and here and there a European or American overseer in charge of the section. The manager at the rail-head said his life was jam to the lives they had up on the plantations. But once in a while they meet and have some sort of a jamboree, like the one the skipper and his party went off to this morning. I believe they were going to a race meeting. I'm glad I didn't have to go ninety miles in a train in this heat.'

'Skipper didn't go by train,' said Ware. 'He went off at dawn in a launch with the manager. They were going up a river for about twenty miles and then pick up the train after a mule ride over an old Indian trail. The manager wanted the skipper to see the country.' Ware spoke drowsily, as if thinking aloud, conscious that he was recapitulating facts with which the Commander was already familiar.

The latter paid no attention to him and stared inshore. A launch had cast off from the jetty and was heading towards the ship. 'Now,' he muttered, 'who's this coming off at half-past two of a make-and-mend afternoon? Don't tell me its visitors, because I don't think I can bear it at this time of day—' He stretched out his hand for the telescope. 'Let's have a look-see. . . . There doesn't appear to be anyone in the stern-sheets.'

The quartermaster, ignoring the fact that the Commander sat with the telescope focused on the boat, approached the officer of the day, and said briskly: 'Launch approaching from the shore, sir.'

'Thank you,' murmured Ware, and opened his book. The quartermaster turned away with the air of a man who, having done his best to enliven the monotony of a dull afternoon, had been let down by his audience. 'Stand by, you!' he barked at the side-boy. The lad looked startled. 'Stand by to nip down the ladder and pass him the check-line,' supplemented the quartermaster. He walked out on to the platform of the accommodation ladder and eyed the approaching boat with severity. His expression suggested that he suspected it contained an armed boarding party. The Commander handed the telescope back to its owner, crossed his legs and yawned again.

'I wouldn't mind this place so much if we could bathe,' he grumbled. 'But all these South American waters are swarming with sharks.' He eyed the becalmed whaler sourly. 'Why don't they catch a shark?'

The officer of the day had no theories to advance. 'P'raps they're trying to,' he suggested, after a period of sleepy reflection.

'P'raps they are,' muttered the Commander. 'When I was a snottie in the East Indies, our Chief Boatswain's Mate used to carry a bit of shark's skin to scratch himself with. He had prickly heat. . . . You're not listening to me.'

'Yes, I am, sir. I hear better when I close my eyes. It concentrates all the faculties on the optic nerves—I mean the—what sort of nerves do you have in your ears?'

'Oral nerves.'

'That's it. Blind people have very sensitive hearing. There was a blind man in our village at home who could hear if you dropped your handkerchief. Go on telling me about the Chief Buffer, sir.'

The quartermaster again approached from the gangway, carrying a letter.

'Passed up by a coloured party in the launch from the shore, sir.' He extended a piece of paper twisted into the semblance of a cocked hat which was addressed to the Commander, and from its appearance

might have been delivered from one hot hand to another across the continent.

'I asked him if there was an answer, and he passed some remark about a carter. Sounded like carter,' added the quartermaster with the pitying disdain of his kind for all tongues but the Anglo-Saxon.

'*Carta*,' murmured the Commander. 'That means "letter". Tell him to wait alongside till I've read it. It's from the skipper,' he added, addressing Ware. 'Now what in the name of Mike has fired him to sit down in the middle of a banana plantation and write to me?' He untwisted the missive rather gingerly.

The quartermaster returned to the gangway and hailed the dusky gentleman at the wheel of the launch who was engaged in rolling a cigarette; he wore a green talc eye-shade, a shirt of faded pink, and tight-fitting, rather soiled white flannel trousers with a blue stripe.

'Ang on, Josay!' shouted the former. 'Savee, 'ang on?'

The occupant of the launch showed his teeth in a little smile as he ran the tip of his tongue along the cigarette paper. '*Bueno!*' he said, and nodded.

'I can talk pretty near all these Dago languages,' observed the quartermaster to the side-boy.

'Can you talk *his* lingo—Spanish, ain't it?' queried the boy.

'Well—not so much talk it, as make meself understood, as you might say. I was up the Straits last commission. You stand by to coil down the check-line when he shoves off.'

The side-boy descended the ladder slowly. 'I've been standing by to stand by all the blessed afternoon,' he observed to himself.

The South American seafarer under the tattered awning blew a cloud of smoke through his nostrils. 'Veree 'ot,' he observed.

'Not 'arf,' agreed the side-boy. They smiled at each other, aware of a sudden inexplicable sympathy. It was based—although neither was sufficiently introspective to be aware of the fact—on a mutual conviction that the quartermaster was a bit of an ass.

The Commander sat with his cap tilted back off his forehead, frowning at the letter in his hand. 'Stiffen the Dutch!' he ejaculated at length and transferred his gaze to the distant mountains. Ware eyed the second-in-command with drowsy interrogation.

'No answer, quartermaster,' said the Commander suddenly. 'Tell the launch to carry on.'

'Aye, aye, sir.' The quartermaster leaned over the rail. 'Carry on, Josay. No answer—savvy? *Mondoosh* answer. Carry on——' He made a large gesture of dismissal.

The swarthy messenger nodded, smiling. '*Muchas gracias, Senor. Adios.*' His clattering engine woke to life; he cast off the check-line,

slipped in the clutch and left the gangway with a bubbling swirl under his counter, heading back towards the jetty.

'Listen to this, my lad,' said the Commander in a voice of awful calm.

"I am sending this note down the line by trolley and hope you will get it in good time. I have a feeling that we ought to do something about these people. There are about twenty whites of various nationalities and some of them have got women. They are rather pathetic. At least that's how they strike me. They give one the impression that if they don't get a change of scene for a few hours, they'll go mad. So I've asked them to a party on board tonight. We shall get back by a train arriving about 8 p.m. Will you be a brick as usual and have everything rigged and some sort of buffet meal ready? Sorry to let you all in for this, but it seemed indicated.

"P.S.—In case of any uncertainty about expenses, remember it's my show."

In the silence that ensued the sound of the launch's engine was still audible, retreating into the distance.

'Expenses, my foot!' ejaculated the Commander irritably. 'Of course we'll all come in for our share of the racket.'

'Rather,' agreed Ware. 'But why pathetic? Why did they strike the Captain as pathetic?'

'Oh, how do I know! And why should coming on board us cure their ruddy—what's the word I want?'

'Pathoquage,' suggested Ware after a reflective pause.

'The truth of the matter,' pursued the Commander, ignoring this unexpected contribution to the English dictionary, 'is that the Captain can't be trusted to go ashore without a keeper. I mean somebody with a heart like a flint who will keep an eye on him and put a stopper on his impulsiveness. Otherwise this ship would be a kind of floating home for lost dogs, an orphanage, a rescue-home and a—what's the place called where Boy Scouts go?'

'Heaven?'

'No—a jamboree. The Captain can't go ashore without inviting all the Boy Scouts in the continent to tea, and they came trooping on board and disconnect the gun-circuits and jamb their beastly little fingers in the breech-blocks and clatter about all over my enamel with their hobnail boots and broomsticks, and they have to have pussers' dirks whacked out to them and the Chief Yeoman—'

'But this show hasn't got anything to do with Boy Scouts, has it, sir?' interrupted Ware with some bewilderment.

'No. This is worse.' The Commander folded the letter and got down from the capstan. 'Well, even if I have got to turn the ship into a *Palaise de Danse* for bored banana planters, the sailors are going to

have their make-and-mend in peace. We'll have part of the watch after evening quarters and they can get on with it.' He eyed the becalmed whaler sourly. 'I've a jolly good mind to hoist their recall and make them pull back to the ship—just to break the news to them that they're going to have a New Year's Eve party. Anyhow, see that they're back by four, because the Pay will have to get busy with the cook over this buffet supper business and Torps has the lighting to see to.' The speaker sauntered forward and disappeared round an angle of the superstructure. The officer of the day sighed, opened his book, tried to find the place where he had left off reading, and gave it up as a bad job. The quartermaster took up the tale of tripe where he had dropped it, and peace reigned once more.

## II

The Commander, tubbed and freshly shaven, the sunburn on his long dour face accentuated by white mess jacket and starched linen, stepped out of his cabin on to the quarter-deck and stood eyeing the scene critically. Ware stood, his telescope under his arm and the shiny loop of his sword belt visible against his thigh, contemplating a trio of seamen sweeping down the starboard side with soft brooms. The side-boy followed in their wake, scattering powdered chalk from a cigarette tin with a perforated lid. Coloured lanterns suspended overhead threw a discreet and romantic illumination over the quarter-deck. The port-side was occupied with a long table where a steward was superintending the transporting, by three marine wardroom attendants, of dishes of eatables. A couple of signalmen, with wisps of twine in their mouths, were putting the finishing touches to pendants of red and white bunting that hung at intervals from the awning and were gathered into little waists at the rail. Between these clusters of drapery, the darkness that had swept in over the sea, obliterating the harbour and the swamps, the mountains and the last greenish gleam in the sky above them, was like a wall of tangible blackness.

The Commander walked to the seat on the capstan he had occupied earlier in the afternoon and, sitting down, lit a cigarette. The faces of the men working aft were engrossed with the tasks they performed. He had merely given orders that the quarter-deck was to be rigged for a dance and dismissed the matter from his mind. His part would come later. But the lighting and the bunting, the immaculate deck and polished metal, was the work of grave-faced seamen, giving their best for an entertainment in which they would have no part. Not merely because he had given the order, but for

the credit of the ship and pride in the work of their hands. It was not always like that in ships. That was a spirit only one person aboard could inspire—the Captain. This was the Captain's show, and as far as it lay in the power of every man concerned it was going to be a success. He could read it, as he sat there, in the intent expressions, the lingering last touches; one by one they finished and moved forwards, to pause once for a backward critical glance before they disappeared.

Ware came towards him, his telescope dangling from the hands he clasped behind his back. 'Cheer up, sir. It's not going to be as bad as all that. They're not Boy Scouts, after all!'

The Commander contemplated the end of his cigarette. 'It's not the party, though Lord knows I hate 'em. It's the skipper——'

'The Captain! Why, sir, he's the——'

'I know. You can't tell me anything about him. He was my nurse when I was a snottie. Hang it, I—I know the man.'

'Then what's wrong?'

The Commander glanced forward to ensure they were out of ear-shot. 'Well, Tony, seeing as 'ow I married your sister and I know I can trust you, I'll let you into a breach of confidence. We got a mail when he arrived here yesterday, d'you remember?'

The other nodded.

'Well, the Captain got a letter from the Admiralty to say he was being axed. I mean he's not going to be employed when he gets promoted to Flag Rank, and so he goes on the retired list.'

'Do you mean they are going to chuck him out? The skipper! Our captain! But *why*? He'd make the finest Admiral that ever commanded a Fleet——'

'The Admiralty don't think so, apparently.'

'But what principle do they work on? For pity's sake what is their idea of what a man ought to be?'

'I don't know. It's not my business or yours to criticise. I'm only stating fact. I don't know why I blurted this out. But sometimes——' He broke off abruptly. The wine steward, carrying a tray of glasses, followed by his acolyte with a basket of bottles, approached and began arranging the glasses on a small table abaft the after gun. Having concluded these arrangements to his satisfaction, he poured the contents of several bottles into a jug and began agitating them with a swizzle-stick.

'You'll have to send the cutter in tow of the motor-boat to bring off this party,' observed the Commander with a glance at this wrist-watch. 'Better call them away now.'

'Aye, aye, sir,' Ware tucked the telescope under this arm again

and walked forward. The Commander sat moodily watching the wine steward. From the officers' bathroom below came the sound of splashing and laughter. The thin wail of the quartermaster's pipe drifted aft as he called away the motor-boat and cutter. The wine steward went on manipulating the swizzle-stick. He was a baldish man with blunt features and high cheek-bones. His expression as he bent over his task was intent and faintly distrustful, like that of a man handling a dangerous animal. He was responsible for several hundred pounds' worth of wines and spirits. The Commander, watching him, concluded that this explained his expression. What the Commander did not know was that the desire for drink, stronger at times than others, never left him entirely. The smell of alcohol was hardly ever out of his nostrils: not a drop passed his lips from the beginning of a commission to the end.

The Paymaster came up the after hatchway, strolled towards the buffet and surveyed the array of dishes with a coldly professional eye. The Torpedo Lieutenant, one Picton, encountered him as he stepped on to the quarter-deck from forward.

'Behold the Paymaster gloating! "Jasus, phwat diet!" Are there enough sausage rolls to feed the multitude? What are these among so many?'

'Enough? All I know is my entire staff of cooks has been lashing out since eight bells making sausage rolls. And look at that chicken loaf. Look at that ham——'

'If it's the one we had for breakfast I don't need to. I could shut my eyes and know it was there. What are those wobbly things?'

'Prawns in aspic. Absolutely no stint. Trifle——'

'Would it have a kick in it, the trifle?'

'Most generously laced with rum. Smell it.'

'I daren't. I know it would make me tight. What's that custardy effect?'

'Banana custard.'

'But you can't give them bananas!' Picton stepped back in mock dismay. 'Man alive, they've been living in the middle of bananas for years. Bananas to right of them, bananas to left of them, bananas on top of them. Their clothes are made of banana skins; they dream of bananas; they throw them at each other; they use them for billiard cues and make fountain pens out of them. They're coming here to escape from bananas. They——'

'Well, anyway these were beginning to go off a bit,' interrupted the mess caterer calmly, 'and the cook thought he'd better use them up. You'd have had them as fritters if we'd been dining in the mess in the ordinary way.'

Picton turned away from the table. 'Well, I don't feel it's right. Anything but bananas. Tapioca—prunes. Don't you agree, Commander? Even haricot beans——'

'I don't know what the blazes you're talking about,' said the Commander.

'I was trying to get a rise out of the Pay.' He paused, eyed the wine steward and glanced interrogatively from the Commander to the Paymaster.

'Yes.'

'Then give us three small samples of that blackstrap you're brewing, Travers. What is it?'

'Martini cocktails,' replied the steward without raising his eyes from the swizzle-stick he continued to rotate.

'Things I never touch.' The Paymaster accepted the glass handed to him, nodded to the other two and sipped. 'Under any circumstances but these unusual—I may say unprecedented—ones in which we find ourselves to-night.' He took another sip. 'And how soon are we to expect the gay throng from the beach, Commander?'

'In about a quarter of an hour. Motor-boat and cutter are on their way in now.' The speaker glanced at his wrist-watch. 'Train is due in about five minutes.'

'And when they arrive I suppose our gallant expeditionary force will want baths and a change, while the burden of entertaining these banana experts falls on us.'

'That's the big idea.'

'In that case——' The Paymaster extended his empty glass to the steward—'Contrary to the principles and temperate habits of a lifetime, I shall have to have the other half, please, Travers.'

'Me too,' said the Torpedo Lieutenant. He sipped and sighed. 'That's better. Now, Commander, let us all get our objective clearly in focus. What exactly is all this *About*? I mean what, in the immortal words of the Black Crows, *Causes* this?'

'You'd better ask the Captain when he gets on board. This is just one of his pranks, God bless him. He met a crowd ashore somewhere in the wilderness and he felt sorry for them. So he asked them on board. It's New Year's Eve.'

'God bless my soul!' said the Paymaster. 'So it is.' He eyed the wine steward wistfully. 'Nothing but the austere principles of a lifetime restrains me——'

'And as far as it is in my power to make the show a success,' continued the Commander, 'it's going to be one.'

'Quite,' said Picton. 'We're with you there, sir. The point is'—he eyed the illuminations softly reflected in surfaces of polished metal



and enamel all about them—'I like to adapt my lighting schemes to suit the kind of party we're having. Atmosphere. . . .' He selected an olive and put it in his mouth. 'Pen's—I beg your pardon—enormous olives these are. . . . It depends on the characters of the guests very largely—'

'I can tell you nothing about them other than the fact that they've provoked the Captain to pity.'

'Exactly. Then I feel—' He broke off as the remnant of the officers remaining on board appeared on the quarter-deck. 'Here comes the P.M.O. He ought to know all about the psychology of lighting effects. P.M.O., come and give me your opinion on the scenic effects.'

The officer addressed advanced. 'I am not clear,' he announced, 'who'll be paying for this party. As a member of the mess committee I was not consulted. As a married man living on my pay—'

'It's the Captain's party—at least he thinks it is. But I think—'

'Is it the skipper's intention to pay the cost of it? That's what I'm asking.'

'You won't be asked to pay a penny, old chap. All you've got to do is look cheerful. Have one of Travers's gloom-raisers.'

'Will it be going down on my wine bill?'

'No, dash it, on mine.'

'Well, that's fair enough. Maybe I'll have a glass of sherry.'

'That shows the proper party spirit even if it costs more.'

Ware appeared from the direction of the gangway. 'The boats have just been reported returning to the ship, sir.'

The Commander rose and, walking to the rail, stood staring out into the darkness. The ship's volunteer band were taking their seats abaft the after hatchway.

'In my opinion the practice of offering salted almonds and the like to guests is a mistake,' said the Surgeon Commander. 'It merely provokes thirst and they drink more than—'

The Paymaster Commander removed an olive stone from his mouth. '—is good for them. P.M.O., I am with you, absolutely. Look at me: normally a clean-cut young Briton. To-night—' He extended his glass to the wine-steward. 'A sot, sir. A very toss-pot. Olives. Entirely due to olives. Travers, abstemious to a fault as you know me to be, I think perhaps—'

The Commander turned from the rail. 'Boat's just coming along side. Stand by,' he said.

## III

The Commander stepped on to the quarter-deck from the Captain's cabin, where he had had a brief colloquy with his superior officer while the latter hurriedly commenced his bath; he stood for a moment in an endeavour to bring, as Picton had expressed it, his objective into focus.

He had not had time, as he stood at the gangway and greeted each of the guests in turn, to sum up any very clear impression of them as a whole. He remembered wondering how the women—there were about eight of them—had contrived to travel sixty miles by train in tropical conditions after a long day in the sun, and arrive on board looking as if they had, each one of them, just turned away from a dressing-table mirror. Of the men he had a clearer general impression. They were nearly all young men with moist eager handshakes that nearly crippled him. Very few of them were of the class that regards a dinner jacket as an accessory to an evening entertainment, yet all of them had made some attempt to vary their everyday garments: some had black bow ties: a few wore the suits in which they had embarked at some port in the Northern Hemisphere in search of fortune, palpably 'best' suits of a day gone by. They were all very hot, very shy, very dishevelled as to the hair. Dimly he began to understand something of the emotions that prompted his Captain to give this party.

He moved aft and saw that the ladies sat aloof in a row where Picton, Ware and Norris, the Senior Engineer, were assiduously attending to them with pink and yellow beverages and things on little plates. The male contingent, to the number of a score or so, had gathered round Travers and his swizzle-stick, where the Paymaster and the Surgeon Commander were doing their best to dispel the almost painful decorum that ruled beneath the muzzle of the after six-inch gun, gleaming with a last minute burnishing.

'Sticky!' he thought to himself. 'This is going to be the stickiest party that ever happened.' Perhaps it would be better when the others, who were now hastily changing, appeared.

He approached the nearest guest, a fair thickset man of about his own age who was standing looking about him with an expression the Commander found oddly familiar. Unlike the majority he wore the conventional white dinner jacket of the tropics, and there was something in his manner and poise that suggested he was at home in his surroundings.

'Your First Lieutenant—he come up soon?'

'I expect so. He's gone down to shift. Did you meet him ashore?'

'Ja! We were friends.' He looked the Commander straight in the eyes. 'I am a German. He is the first English Naval Officer I have spoken to since the war began.'

The Commander smilingly held out his hand. 'I am so glad to welcome you on board. Let's have a cocktail to celebrate it.'

'I too was in the Navy. The Imperial Navy. I was a submarine officer during the war.'

'Well, then of course you and Number One clicked. He was in submarines too.'

The other nodded and accepted his drink. 'I know. This afternoon we talk. *Gott im Himmel*, it was good! He is *ein guter Kerl*. How you say—a good scout.' The German looked about him wistfully. 'It is many years since I was on board a man-of-war. When you grow bananas for a living it is better to——' He broke off, drew himself up stiffly and raised his glass. 'I drink to your Navy,' he said simply.

'And I to yours. My Captain will be here presently,' he added.

'You have a wonderful Captain. He has the gift of making men happy, of keeping men happy. I watch him this afternoon. I know men. In our Navy during the war we could not keep the men happy all of the time. I believe we have learned since. I myself did not learn. So I grow bananas. . . . You have a very good band, Commander.'

'Yes,' said the Commander absently. 'That's just it. . . .' He forced himself out of his abstraction. 'The band? Oh, it's just a volunteer band—ah; here's Number One. Now you and he can get together.' He stood smiling as the First Lieutenant after a quick survey of the throng from his great height came quickly towards them.

'Ah, Von Kloss—there you are! Sorry to desert you, but I had to change.' He slipped his hand inside the German's arm. 'Commander, this is Von Kloss, late of the Imperial German Navy. We've been comparing notes and, by Jove, the blighter once took a sitter at us one moonlight night when we were waiting for a convoy off Gib. I saw the track of his filthy torpedo and it missed us by six feet. What d'you know about that!' He gave a great laugh and drew his guest towards the cocktail table. 'And we're jolly well going to celebrate it! Just those few seconds on the arc. . . .' His voice was lost in the gradually increasing hum of conversation and the strains of the band.

The Commander stood irresolutely for a moment after they had turned away, arm linked in arm, and his gaze returned to the ladies. They sat bolt upright and unsmiling, ignoring each other, each with a plate on her lap and a glass in her hand, as if vying with each other who could maintain the longest a pose of fantastic and uncompromising decorum. Their cavaliers had apparently found the task of break-

ing the ice somewhat daunting and were standing in attendance each with a fixed and vacuous smile, beating time to the band with one foot and staring into vacancy.

He took a long breath, wishing his Captain would hurry up with his toilet, and advanced towards the nearest lady. He noted as he approached that she was young with blond, elaborately waved hair and remarkable eyes, which she raised to his with a look, partly defiant, part shrewd inquiry, as he stood before her.

'Aren't you tired of sitting there?' he asked.

'I sure am,' was the prompt reply.

'Then come along and we'll find somewhere . . .' For a moment he wondered what on earth to do with her. The crowd around the buffet table made dancing impracticable for the moment.

She stood up and handed him her empty glass. 'Say, I'd like another glass of that punch.'

He fetched it for her, observing as he handed it to her the astounding polish on her pointed finger-nails. 'It's claret cup. Do you like it?'

'It's swell. It's got a whole lot of kick in it.' She sipped thoughtfully. 'Can I bring it along?'

'Do,' he replied, wondering what outrage Travers had perpetrated in the name of claret cup and hospitality.

They strolled forward until they reached the accommodation ladder. 'I think it's cooler there,' he said, and led her way out on to the platform under the stars. A line of incandescent bulbs ran down the length of the balustrade, throwing jiggling reflections into the calm water.

'Let's sit right there on one of these steps,' said the girl. 'There's room for us both.' She descended half-way and sat down, gathering her skirts about her with one hand and holding her glass with the other. He squeezed in beside her.

'My, it's lovely here,' said the girl, and sat very still, staring into the darkness beyond the belt of faint illumination made by the lights upon the water. The tide was setting seaward, its movement revealed by minute particles of weed and marine organisms beneath the surface that reflected the light in pale gleams drifting slowly aft under their vision. On the outermost rim of the light a fish splashed from time to time; beyond the reflections and the mysterious drifting gleams there was darkness, profound, limitless, cutting off from their consciousness by an impenetrable curtain sea and land and the myriads of lives upon it.

The girl suddenly raised her glass to her lips and drank the contents. 'This is a dandy party. Where's your Captain? I've been

looking out for him ever since we got on the boat. My! Isn't he wonderful?'

'He's changing his clothes. He'll be along soon.'

'It must be fine to live on a boat like this and go around the world meeting folks and throwin' parties everywhere,' she observed reflectively.

'It is rather amusing,' he agreed. 'But we don't throw an awful lot of parties. There's a good deal of hard work and we are just as likely to be rushed off to some place that's been hit by an earthquake or a hurricane as we are to throw a party.'

'Still you get around. Say, why did you throw this party to-night?'

'It was the Captain's idea. He thought it would be fun if we all saw the Old Year out together.'

'Yeh, I gessed it was his notion. Tell me about your Captain. Is he married?'

'Yes.'

'What's his wife like?'

'She's charming.'

'I guess she'd be cute. . . . Say, can I have a cigarette? . . . That's fine. . . .' She exhaled a cloud of smoke with a little hiss. 'My, it's queer to be here. Like a kinda dream. When you've sat around so long in one place an' only seen the same folk all the time—Why! . . .' He felt her give a little shudder. 'But I'm through. Through!' she repeated almost defiantly.

'Do you mean you are leaving this country?'

'Yeh. I guess so. I'm gonna beat it. . . . Say, I feel I've gotta tell somebody. I had a notion all the way down in that train that when I got on your boat I'd tell somebody. An' when I saw you comin' along I said to myself, I'm gonna tell him. You don't care anyway. You're kinda hard-boiled I guess . . . and you ain't goin' to see me again. . . . You ain't bound to listen. But just to-night—'

'Go ahead,' said the Commander and clasped his hands round his knees.

'I was 'way up in New Orleans when Davy came there on vacation six months ago. Davy's my boy. I live with him on his plantation. I was in a kinda joint in New Orleans. Well, Dave came along pretty flush with money he'd saved up and we had a swell time together. And then he asked me how'd I like to go back to the plantations with him. He was lonely, he said, and I was kinda fond of him and he told me about the tropics. You know: hammocks an' whisky-sours an' Indians fanning you with palm leaves and all that bunk, so I thought it would be fine to get away from the joint an' be

a real swell Jane, 'cos he said that every white woman on the plantation was treated like a lady, an'—an' so I went along with Dave. He'd bought me a dandy lot of frocks—this is one: what the damp an' the ants have left of it—and he said he'd buy me a wedding ring, but I said I didn't care one way or the other. . . . Say, I don't really know why I'm telling you this after all. I guess it's that punch.' She cyed the empty glass meditatively.

He smiled. 'Nonsense! It's only lemonade and claret. Won't you let me get you another?'

'Sure!'

When he returned she was sitting with her chin in her palm, staring into the water that flowed imperceptibly past a few feet beneath her.

She accepted the glass and drank some of the contents.

'Say, have you ever seen the plantations?'

He shook his head and resumed his seat. 'No, I wasn't in the party that went up there today.'

'To-day! Why, that wasn't the plantations. The Indians had a race meeting and we all went up the line to Xypatiel and made big whoopee. That's our one big scene in the year, Say, can you imagine the folks in Hell crawling outa their holes and saying: "Boys, let's throw a party!" That's the way it is with us. That was the kinda party we had to-day. No, sir, I'm not talking about that party. I was going to tell you about the plantation.' She drank again.

'So I went with Dave—me and my trunk of frocks—into the banana country. D'you know what it's like? Thousands and thousands of banana plants growing in lines—nothing to see but bananas, nothing to talk about but bananas. We had a house—kinda shack with a mosquito-proof piazza, an' Dave was away all day. . . . I used to lie in bed till the sun got low and then I'd put on one of my frocks and fix my face and wait for him . . . and after a bit he didn't notice my frocks any, or my face. He just usta have his supper and go to sleep. . . .'

She was silent so long, sitting deep in reflection with her eyes on the water, that the Commander glanced at her. 'Well?' he said at last.

She roused herself from her reverie and took up her drab tale in a low voice that held no emotion whatsoever.

'There was a boy in the next plantation who usta dope. It's easy to get it through the Indians. So one time he passed a paper of the stuff to Dave. Well, I'd seen all the fun you get outa happy-dust back in New Orleans, and I didn't plan for Dave to go that way. So I told the boy to keep away from Davy or be fired. The manager is

broad-minded some but he don't stand for snow among the employees. So he kept away from Dave, but Dave had had a sniff,—see? I had to watch him. So to keep him from getting too all-fired dull we got some of the other boys along week-ends to play poker, and Dave and them all got drunk. . . .

She fell silent again, staring at the glass in her long over-manicured fingers.

'What do you do when they get drunk?' asked the Commander.

'Get drunk too,' she replied calmly.

A loud voice from above interrupted the Commander's reflections.

'Hey, Baby—are you all right there?' He looked up to meet the suspicious gaze of a young man leaning over the quarter-deck rail. The girl raised her head quickly.

'Hello, Big Boy! I'm fine. Don't you worry. You jest run and enjoy yourself, honey.'

'We're having a whale of a time an' I wondered where you'd got put,' replied the young man.

'Well, you can quit wondering now,' replied the lady, 'cos me and the Commander are going to stay right here where it's cool.'

Something in the Commander's smile perhaps disarmed the young man's suspicions, because he withdrew with a wave of the hand.

'That's Dave,' she said. 'He don't trust anybody. They don't, 'way up on the plantations.' She mused awhile. 'Maybe he's right. Poor Davy. . . . Well, so there was a boy who usta come to our shack and he got kinda crazy about me, and I—I guess I got to like him quite a bit, and a while back his aunt in New York died and left him a whole wad of dollars, so he's quit of the plantations and going right back in the next boat. So one night he asked me would I go along with him. I guess I was at my limit, crazy-sick of the empty days and the booze and those everlasting bananas, and I didn't have much message for Dave anyway, or him for me, so I said I'd go. . . .' Again she fell into one of her silences. 'So to-day I met your Captain. He's an English gentleman. Maybe you wouldn't think I'd know a real gentleman. Well. . . . There's none on the plantations exceptin' Von Kloss. But it wasn't just that. Maybe they was all gentlemen, your party. But your Captain. . . .' The flatness had gone out of her voice. The Commander was aware somehow of her youth: of something ingenuous, wistful, softening her expression. Her voice was not much louder than a murmur.

'Men don't shoot no spell-binding line on me. 'Tain't that. . .'

The stem of the glass suddenly snapped in her fingers.

'Oh, hell! Here—let's quit! Let's be gay! Ain't this a party?'

Didn't he "request the pleasure of our company" to a party? An'—an' here I am sittin' here with my toes turned in like—like an Illinois Sunday School kid! I'll say so! Come on!' She rose swiftly to her feet. 'Say, I've broken your glass.'

He took the pieces from her and dropped them into the water. 'That's as it should be. Now no one can ever drink from it again.' He made her a little bow.

'Well—I guess that's so.' She gathered her frock and commenced ascending the ladder. 'Let's find your Captain. Ain't he finished fixin' himself? I wanta talk to him. . . . There's only a few hours left and then we'll be gone. . . .'

They had reached the quarter-deck as she finished the sentence. The band was playing a waltz, and all the ladies were dancing. The majority of the male guests had repaired to the buffet. The stilted decorum that prevailed earlier in the evening had vanished. Above the notes of the music he heard the hubbub of conversation and laughter. The women's faces wore gratified smiles as they swayed to the rhythm of the dance. Everybody was playing up, bless 'em. It was going to be a good party after all.

'Say—where is he?' demanded his companion. For an instant he had forgotten her existence. He looked about him and walked forward a few paces. Through the open door in the superstructure he could see his Captain sitting on the cabin settee with Von Kloss. They had a chart open on their knees and the German was laughing. The girl stepped into the doorway. He heard her eager: 'Say, Captain, ain't you going to dance with me?' and as he turned away encountered the First Lieutenant. 'Is Von Kloss in there? I've got some photographs in my cabin I want to show him.'

'Take him along,' said the second-in-command. 'I fancy the Captain is going to be busy for a while.'

He sauntered aft and from force of habit sat down again on the grating of the after capstan. A marine attendant paused before him with a tray of whiskies and soda. He took one and sipped it, watching the faces of the dancers and the throng that had gathered before the buffet.

*Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole . . .*

Where had he read that? This crowd of strangers coming upon them out of the darkness had brought the lines into his mind. They appeared almost without warning, and without warning he had been given glimpses into a few of their lives—the passions, perplexities and degradations that beset them somewhere on the other



side of that mysterious curtain of the night. He studied the profiles of the men as they stood eating with plates in their hands, talking with shy animation to their hosts. They looked a sufficiently commonplace cosmopolitan crowd; one of them was presumably the man who doped and somewhere in the gathering was the lad whose aunt had left him a wad of dollars. Dave he saw spooning a plateful of—yes, undoubtedly banana custard into his mouth. He didn't look a bad sort of boy. And yet, even while he devoured custard, his soul hung suspended between the doper and the legatee. It was all very interesting and extraordinary. Did the girl really mean to go off and leave him to the loneliness and the happy-dust? She was a callous little baggage: but perhaps you didn't learn much about self-renunciation in the joints of New Orleans. . . . He sat absently watching the wine steward engrossed in his rites behind the little table, wondering what other tragedies were hidden behind the laughter and the growing gaiety all about him. Had the Captain any inkling of the girl's story? Was this one of the situations he had found pathetic?

'Travers,' he said, and made a beckoning motion with his finger.

The steward raised his queer deep-set eyes for an instant and dropped them again. He relinquished his task and crossed the deck.

'It seems to be going all right, Travers.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Consumption heavy?'

'No, sir. They're drinking very little. Mostly claret cup.'

The band stopped and a squarish woman with hard eyes detached herself from her partner and sat down beside the Commander.

'I had to come and tell you,' she said, 'on behalf of all of us, how much we appreciate this—no, sit down—let us have a nice chat here.' She fanned herself with her handkerchief.

'That's awfully nice of you,' murmured the Commander. 'Won't you let me get you a little refreshment?'

'Well, perhaps a glass of claret cup. I had one just now and found it most refreshing. I seldom touch anything alcoholic. There is so much of that sort of thing on the plantations. In fact a great deal too much, and I feel somebody should set an example. But claret cup, at a party—'

'Is plainly indicated,' laughed the Commander. He beckoned to a waiter.

The lady sipped. 'My husband and I are English and that is why I came to thank you in the name of us all.' She looked round the gathering, sitting bolt upright, the glass poised.

'As a matter of fact, it's the Captain's party,' said the Commander. 'I am afraid I can take no credit for it. It was his idea entirely——'

'I know.' She nodded her head vigorously. 'Actually I was with him when the idea occurred to him. You weren't up at Xypatiel this afternoon, were you? That was our annual gathering. The Indians have horse-races and we make it an excuse to meet each other—all the Europeans and Americans on plantations along the railway line. I was telling your Captain about our community; in fact I felt I almost had to apologise. . . .' Again she scanned the quarter-deck. 'I don't see him now—but I felt it my duty to tell your Captain what a mixed community it was: all sorts of people, and amongst them, this man. . . . I can see you know about him. Directly I saw you sitting here, all by yourself, I said to myself: "No wonder!"' She took another sip. The Commander stared at her with some bewilderment.

'What man? . . . Who are you talking about?'

'That German, of course. It was after I had been telling your Captain about him this afternoon that he—your Captain—suddenly said: "I tell you what, Mrs. Blaketon"—that's my name, Blaketon.—"I've got an idea. Why shouldn't you all come down to the railhead to-night and we'll have a dance on board my ship." Of course we all accepted. I told my husband and he sent round and conveyed the invitation to nearly everybody. But we never dreamed this man would have the effrontery to imagine the invitation included him——'

'Forgive me for interrupting, Mrs. Blaketon, but I still don't know what you are talking about.'

'A German called Von Kloss.'

'Von Kloss! But what about him?'

'Didn't you know he was a submarine officer during the war?'

'Yes, I did know that, as a matter of fact. We're awfully glad to see him on board.'

'Ah!' Mrs. Blaketon pursed up her thin lips and nodded again. 'But perhaps you didn't lose a dear sister, torpedoed in the *Lusitania*.'

'No, I haven't got a sister. I lost three brothers in the war, and a—however, that wasn't in the *Lusitania*.'

'No,' she said. 'Exactly. That's just it. That is my point.'

'I suppose,' replied the Commander uncomfortably, 'that does make you feel a bit differently. But surely after all these years——'

'She was murdered. Could you forgive anybody who murdered your sister?'

'I never had a—— Aren't you taking rather an extreme view? I

mean, their submarine officers were only obeying orders. Outrageous orders, if you like, but they had no alternative. Besides, you can't brand Von Kloss as a murderer just because he belonged to the same service as the man who sank the *Lusitania*.'

'How do you know he wasn't the man himself?' demanded the voice, whose key never changed from a dreary remorselessness.

The Commander stared at her with dismay. What was it the girl from New Orleans had said? 'Say, can you imagine the folks in Hell crawlin' outa their holes. . . .' Here was one of the Hell-makers.

The gospel of hate continued. 'You can imagine how I feel, seeing him on board, a guest on one of our ships—'

The Commander rose. 'This is thirsty work, remembering old griefs. Let me get you a little more claret cup.' He possessed himself of her glass and made his way to the buffet, where he encountered the Paymaster.

'Pay,' he said, and gripping him by the elbow led him out of hearing of the guests. 'Look here, old boy, I've got to write up my night order book. Come and look after this woman, will you, and give her a glass of claret cup.'

'What woman?' asked the Paymaster cautiously.

'The one sitting on the capstan. She's a bit dippy, but as long as you keep pouring claret cup into her—'

'The Lord forbid that I should dig a pit about her feet. I've tasted that claret cup. I don't know what Travers has been up to . . .'

'Wait a moment,' said the other and paused. A few yards away Von Kloss and the First Lieutenant were passing on their way to the after hatchway. The face of the lady on the capstan, in her effort to appear unconscious of the German's presence, had assumed an appearance of catalepsy.

'We shall be paying off in October. If you can get some leave then you've got to come and stay with me in Cheshire,' the First Lieutenant was observing in his usual genial roar. 'We'll shoot partridges. . . .' They passed out of earshot.

'Now!' said the Commander, and advanced again to effect the introduction. That concluded he gave a little sigh and threaded his way forward between the dancers towards his cabin.

#### IV

The officers' cook stepped out of his galley and crossed the deck to the ship's side, where he sat down on a bollard, lit a cigarette and appeared to fall into a reverie. It was eleven-thirty and he had been working off and on since 7 a.m. A canvas screen shut off the

approach to the quarter-deck. The notes of the band reached his ears, but from where he sat he could see nothing of what was taking place aft. He had no particular wish to see. There had been a big run on his sausage rolls. He liked the sausage rolls to go well because he was proud of them. There were some cooks who could never make pastry, not ever so, which was due to having hot hands. Corns were his trouble. Corns on the feet. But he had a wonderful light touch with pastry. Learned it from a Maltese cook called Vella. He'd been Vella's mate away back in the days when ships had torpedo-nets. That was going back a bit. Before the war. . . . Vella! All hair—arms, chest, even his throat, and for ever calling on the Madonna. The chef crossed one leg over the other and beat time absently to the music with his foot, thinking about far-off days in galleys of ships on the scrap heap long ago, of the years of scouring pots and peeling spuds that made up his apprenticeship to cooks who were bullies, cooks who drank, cooks who couldn't cook. . . . Vella was the best of the bunch . . . Couldn't read or write, but he could cook.

A few feet away the Torpedo Gunner's Mate leaned over the rail fishing with a hand line: he rested his chin on his disengaged hand and stared into the darkness. In a wooden bucket beside him a couple of small pink fish made an occasional half-hearted flop. The band stopped suddenly.

'Goin' to be a late show?' he enquired presently.

'Couldn't say. I don't think so. 'Ot soup at twelve-thirty's my orders.'

'Hot soup!' ejaculated the Torpedo Gunner's Mate. 'Ain't they hot enough, dancin'?'.

'That's the routine. 'Ot soup. Bullion we calls it.' A marine attendant appeared round the screen. 'Any more sausage rolls, chef?'

'Ain't they never goin' to stop eatin'?' asked the Torpedo Gunner's Mate.

'Don't seem like it.'

The cook rose wearily. 'They'll have to stop soon. This is the last of 'em.' He hobbled across the deck to the preparing room and produced two dishes from a cache under the sink. He always kept a couple of dishes up his sleeve. He liked to give them a bit of a treat at the end. He handed them to the marine and hobbled back to the bollard. The Torpedo Gunner's Mate was detaching another pink, shiny fish from his hook. He threw it into the bucket, where it galvanised the occupants to a sudden renewal of flops. 'Corns shootin'?' he inquired sympathetically.

'Cruel.'

'There was a fellow at Port Said—native chap—he used to suck 'em out of your foot. Through a tube.'

'Nothing never done mine no good,' said the cook mournfully. 'I don't trouble now. Another year to go and I takes my pension. Them sausage rolls went to-night.'

'Kind of speciality of yours, ain't they?'

'I've had ladies come along to the galley, afore now, askin' how I made them. I remember one time the Paymaster brought along a young lady during a dance. Wearin' a pink dress she was and pretty as a picture. The Paymaster said: "This is Petty Officer Howkins, who made the sausage rolls." She stepped right into the galley and held out her hand. . . . Well, I showed her my hands. . . . The cook extended one. It trembled a little with fatigue. The Torpedo Gunner's Mate nodded comprehension "'I don't care," she said, "I must shake hands with the man that made those sausage rolls." So we shook hands. . . . Pretty, she was. . . . The cook lapsed into silence, staring at nothing. His face was grey and shiny as if it had been buttered. On one cheek-bone a pimple that threatened to develop into a boil made a little spot of red. His hair, dark with perspiration, hung in thin wisps on his forehead. 'I shouldn't wonder——' he began.

Travers, the wine steward, appeared round the screen and strolled to the rail, where he began to roll a cigarette.

'Stand easy?' inquired the cook.

Travers nodded. 'A bit of a lull, so I left Morton to carry on.' He contemplated the cigarette and lit it. 'Rum lot aft there.'

The cook looked interested. 'In what way would they be rum?'

Travers reflected. 'They put me in mind of a party we once picked up off an island in the Pacific in a ship I was in. They'd been shipwrecked. Not for very long, but long enough for the women to get kind of demoralised.'

The Torpedo Gunner's Mate drew in his line, examined the bait and lowered it again to the bottom. 'Demoralised in what sort of way?'

'The way they're apt to,' replied Travers, and blew a reflective cloud of smoke. 'Came aboard of us. . . . You know—everything shipshape: discipline, bugles and that. . . . Funny to see 'em come to their senses.'

'I wouldn't say,' mused the Torpedo Gunner's Mate, 'but what it might have that effect on 'em, though I'm a bachelor meself.'

'Who was your cook aboard that ship?' inquired the chef.

Travers shook his head. 'I can't call his name to mind. A Maltese he was—all furry——'

'Vella?'

'That's him.'

'Ah!' observed the chef. 'I don't wonder they come to respect themselves aboard of that ship. I was his mate once. There's nothin' like food cooked proper to make people respect themselves. I shouldn't wonder——' He broke off, removed one of his boots and sat meditatively nursing the toes, in blue worsted socks of great thickness, in his hand.

'Would you surmise this party aft was playin' hell?' inquired the Torpedo Gunner's Mate with interest.

'There's one there,' said Travers, 'a proper Bit. Little dark girl: she was playin' them fellers off one against the other. Her husband got her in a corner and started to tell her off. "Can't you behave decent just this one evening," he said. "You leave me alone," she said, "I'm goin' to enjoy meself to-night." So after a bit I saw her get Mr. Picton to take her off somewhere, and her husband came along to me for another drink. He wasn't enjoyin' himself not so's you'd notice.'

'Mr. Picton's all right,' interposed the Torpedo Gunner's Mate.

'Course he is. She come back lookin' bored. I know that sort. There was one in the shipwrecked party. There's no peace anywhere when they're around.'

The fish in the bucket flopped noisily for a second or two and apparently surrendered to the inevitable.

'There's another one,' continued Travers after a pause, 'with false teeth. Put me in mind of a Sunday School teacher in my village when I was a boy. Bad-fittin' ones. She was sittin' along with the Surgeon Commander, tellin' him how most of the other women was no better than they should be.'

'Maybe she was right,' conjectured the Torpedo Gunner's Mate: 'they sounds a rum lot. How about the men?'

'Now they,' replied Travers, 'are for all the world like a lot of kids at a treat—behavin' nice and knowin' they are, if you understand. All sorts—American, Greek, Belgian. A rough lot, but enjoyin' themselves—and eat! You'd think they'd been starved for months.'

Something like a simper of gratification passed over the cook's tired face and vanished. The Captain's steward appeared round the screen and joined the group. He exchanged significant glances with Travers.

'Not up to our usual form I think,' he observed.

'A rum lot from all I hear,' commented the Torpedo Gunner's Mate. 'I took a lot of trouble with the lighting too. . . .'

'Some of them,' said the Captain's steward sententiously, 'wouldn't trouble if there was no lighting at all. A most queer lot, upon my soul. Hardly a real gentleman or lady among the lot. I can't think what possessed the Captain to give such a party. In my opinion he makes himself cheap. Really, that's what I think. Such queer young women some of them. There was one sitting alone with him a long time, and I happened to lower the trap hatch from my pantry half an inch and I'm blessed if she wasn't pretending to cry.'

'They're artful,' said the cook and put his boot on again.

'There's another one in there now,' pursued the steward. 'English she is. Name of Blaketon.'

'Cryin' too?' inquired the Torpedo Gunner's Mate.

'Not quite but very near it,' replied the Captain's steward.

'Gawd 'elp us,' ejaculated the cook gloomily. 'This ain't a party: it's a wake. What's *she* come near havin' a weep about?'

'I couldn't hear very plain. About her sister bein' murdered, from what I could make of it.'

Travers gave an abrupt laugh. 'There's no sayin' how they'll react.'

'React to what?' asked the steward.

'My claret cup.'

'Did you dope it?' asked the Torpedo Gunner's Mate. The cook gave him a pained glance as though deprecating the crudeness of the suggestion.

'Well,' said Travers, 'commission before the last this ship was up the Baltic, and cruisin' around those ports they had a bottle of something very special given the officers for a present. It come out of the Imperial cellars at Petrograd, looted by the Bolshies. That's the yarn I had from the feller I relieved, anyhow. For all that none of the officers fancied drinkin' the stuff, and it was turned over from one commission to the next. Not on charge, but as it might be a sort of curio.'

'What was it?' asked the Torpedo Gunner's Mate in an awed voice.

'I couldn't say. The label is printed in funny letters. It come from—I don't know—Latvia or Estonia or one of those places.'

The others nodded darkly, as though almost anything could come out of Latvia or Estonia.

'Well,' pursued Travers, 'when I saw that party come over the side to-night I thought to myself: "Those women want takin' right out of themselves, same as the shipwrecked party did." So I nipped down to the store and I fetched up that bottle. . . . Travers threw away the end of his cigarette. . . . There's the band stopped again. I

must get back now. "Auld Lang Syne" at midnight and I shall be busy.' He walked aft and disappeared.

'Roll on one bell and unrig lighting leads,' muttered the Torpedo Gunner's Mate. He jerked his line viciously, paused, and shook his head.

The steward bent down and murmured in the cook's ear. The cook rose from the bollard and hobbled off beside the steward in the direction of the Captain's pantry. 'His orders, mind,' said the steward. "'Don't forget a bottle of beer for the cook.'" He remembered that, upon my soul.

Again the simper of gratification flitted across the cook's face. 'He don't forget nothin'. I shouldn't wonder—'

They passed through the screen door and were lost to view.

## V

Young Ware, who hated all parties, decided that by virtue of being officer for the day he was irreproachably exempt from this one. He had accordingly removed himself and his deck-chair to the after gun-deck quite early in the proceedings, told the quartermaster where he was to be found if wanted, and in the cool darkness under the awning drifted into a light sleep.

He was aware, even while he slept, of the music on the quarter-deck below and of the gradually increasing hum of voices, and laughter. 'Stripping the Willow' and 'Paul Jones' roused him to momentary wakefulness with their tumult of hand-clapping and stamping, but he drifted off to sleep again, secure in the knowledge that the quartermaster would call him in time to strike sixteen bells at midnight.

It seemed to him that some hours elapsed when the sound of voices quite near again awoke him. He opened his eyes, expectant of the quartermaster's summons. But the voice that was speaking was not addressed to him. The speaker, whoever he was, was standing in the darkness on the far side of the anti-aircraft gun, invisible.

'... I hope you don't mind my asking you to come up here where we can talk undisturbed, Von Kloss. But the fact is my wife wanted me to see you before we leave the ship to-night. She has realised that her attitude towards you has been—how shall I put it—biased—prejudiced... unduly prejudiced. I may say that I myself shared her prejudice to some extent....'

'It is only right,' replied the deep voice of the German, now visible to Ware as an indistinct figure in white, 'that you should associate yourself in all things with that so amiable lady your wife.'



Ware was conscious of embarrassment. Ought he to make his proximity known? Both speakers were obviously unconscious of his presence. He sat up in the chair.

'My wife,' continued the first speaker, 'has been talking to the Captain. I will be quite frank. She had always believed—suspected rather—that you were the officer who sank the *Lusitania*.'

'No. That burden my soul does not carry.'

'The Captain assured her that she was under a misapprehension.'

Ware leaned back again. Too late now. He must stop where he was and hope to remain unseen. Feign sleep if necessary.

'Her only sister was drowned when the *Lusitania* was torpedoed,' added the unseen speaker.

'So? That is interesting—to me. I also had a sister once. She was a nurse at a base hospital during the war. She was killed by a bomb dropped by a British machine.'

'Oh, but that was an accident, of course——'

'These things are all the horrible accidents of war.'

'There I cannot agree—however—perhaps you will understand my wife's feelings and make allowances for her attitude towards—well, towards you. In the past, I mean. And she—er—hopes that you will overlook the past. I—I hope so too.'

'The past? With me it is a habit to forget the past.'

'Then you will. . . . I say, that's really awfully decent of you. It was rather difficult to . . . put things in the right light. Awfully difficult. But you came more than half-way. And now supposing we go downstairs and meet my wife. She said, in fact, that she hoped you would come and drink a glass of claret cup with her. Ha! ha! Most unusual suggestion for her to make I assure you. Never touches anything. But as a matter of fact. . . .' They were moving towards the ladder. The speaker's voice grew faint and was drowned by the band. A moment later they had disappeared.

Young Ware took a deep breath. What an extraordinary conversation! If this was a sample of what was going on aft he was well out of this party. He leaned forward and glanced at the luminous dial of his wrist-watch, and as he did so the figure of the quarter-master loomed up out of the darkness.

'Five minutes to eight bells, sir!'

'Right! Thank you.' He rose stiffly from the chair, and looked down on to the quarter-deck. They had stopped dancing and were standing about in little groups. The German, whose conversation he had overheard, was presumably the ex-naval officer he had seen with the First Lieutenant early in the evening. They were having no end of an *entente* on the strength of both having been in submarines dur-

ing the war. Rather decent-looking chap, the German. He could see him now, standing talking to the Captain and a lady with an exceedingly flushed face. As he watched she raised a glass of claret as if toasting the German, who bowed stiffly from the hips. . . . The band was getting ready to play Auld Lang Syne. He must get down to the bell. . . .

He descended the ladder and walked amidships to where the ship's bell hung abaft the officers' galley. On the port side the Torpedo Gunner's Mate was standing fishing over the side. The cook sat on a bollard beside him.

'There's a nice drop of 'ot soup in the galley if you'd fancy some, Mr. Ware,' said the cook with something akin to affection in his voice. He smiled and nodded as he glanced at the clock on the bulkhead. Another minute. How tired the cook looked. For the matter of that he felt pretty tired himself. Ever since that beastly dengue he had wanted to sleep all day. Well, it would soon be over. Another half-hour and he would be able to turn in. What rot all this—midnight!

He jerked the lanyard that hung from the clapper of the bell.

Ding-ding!

Ding-Ding!

. . . Sixteen. The last echo died away, and the pianist gave a preliminary crash of chords.

'*Should auld acquaintance . . .*' Voices mingled with the band and swelled to a great volume of song.

'Appy New Year, Mr. Ware.' It was the cook standing beside him with a cup of soup.

'Oh bless you, Howkins! Thank you. Same to you and many of them.'

'Would you fancy a sausage roll, Mr. Ware? I've got a couple here saved up for you. . . .'

'Splendid! Just the very thing to start the New Year on! Thanks awfully——' He munched and drank and handed the cup back to the cook. 'A comic sort of show aft there, Howkins.' Ware nodded towards the screened-off quarter-deck.

'So I 'eard tell, sir. A rum lot by all accounts.' The cook hobbled off with an empty cup.

'*We'll drink a cup of kindness yet. . . .*' Ware hesitated. It would be interesting to watch all their faces while they were singing. If he went back on to the gun-deck he could look down at it all, unseen. . . . He ran quickly up the ladder and leaned over the blast screen aft. They had formed a circle round the quarter-deck, their clasped hands rising and falling to the rhythm of the music. There was the Captain,

singing like blazes and beaming at everyone. What a topping Captain he was! Kindness and good-will towards men seemed to radiate from him, infecting everybody. The fair girl on his right was the only person who wasn't singing. Probably didn't know the words. There was Von Kloss with the flushed woman between him and the First Lieutenant, and alternating between the white mess jackets of his messmates, the rest of the employees of the World Wide Fruit Company and their women-folk.

Off they went again through another verse, hand clasped hand as if they had all known each other for years. Heavens, what a din! What was Travers thinking about, standing there beside his table of drinks and watching everybody as they circled slowly round the deck? Queer inscrutable face he'd got.

The last verse came to an end and the Captain turned to the band.

'Now then,' he shouted. 'One good gallop to finish off with—off you go!'

'Time to get the boats alongside,' muttered young Ware to himself, and hastened down to the quarter-deck.

. . . . .

He stood at the head of the accommodation ladder superintending the embarkation of guests into the waiting boats and murmuring an indifferent farewell to each as they filed down the ladder.

The last to leave was the fair girl he remembered having seen on his Captain's right during Auld Lang Sync. She went past him as if walking in her sleep and suddenly paused and turned. The Commander stepped out on to the platform beside the officer of the day. 'Have you forgotten anything?' he asked.

Ware recognised the note in the second-in-command's brisk voice. He wanted to get the quarter-deck unrigged, and hated people who hung about at the last minute.

The girl eyed him wistfully. 'No, I ain't forgot anything. Only—I had a notion I'd like to tell you I—I ain't goin' to New York.' She turned abruptly and descended the ladder.

The coxswain of the motor-boat looked up at the officer of the day for his orders. The gangway lights shone down on the upturned smiling faces and waving hands.

'Carry on inshore. Disembark guests and return to the ship.'

'Aye, aye, sir.'

The cruiser's officers were leaning over the rails, calling last farewells.

'Good-bye! . . . Good-bye!'

The motor-boat turned in a wide circle with the cutter in tow.

For a moment longer the two boats remained in the circle of illumination. Ware had a last impression of the fair girl standing in the stern of the cutter staring across the widening expanse of water between the boats and the ship. Then darkness swallowed them. The Commander turned inboard, and as Ware followed him they heard the voices of their late guests, raised in vociferous song, come clear across the water.

*For he's a jolly good fellow,  
For he's a jolly good fellow. . . .*

Young Ware glanced round the quarter-deck. 'That's intended for the Captain, and he's gone off to his cabin—'

The voices were growing fainter:

'For he's a jolly good fello-o-ow. . . .'

The Commander nodded grimly: 'They're quite right. That's just his trouble. . . . Now come on—let's get all this pot-mess cleared up and turn in.'



## A LITTLE DROP O' LEAF

BY TAFFRAIL

### I

THE barometer had fallen with a thump the previous day and now, with the short winter afternoon fast drawing to a close, the weather was as dirty as it possibly could be. A piercing north-easterly gale, with occasional snow-flurries and showers of sleet, howled and shrieked across the harbour until the usually sheltered anchorage was torn and whipped into fury. The tide running against the wind had raised a curling, perpendicular lop of a sea which made boatwork inadvisable, if not positively dangerous, and every ship in the harbour had hoisted her boats and held no communication with the shore.

Masses of flying spindrift, cut from the surface as if with a gigantic sickle, went hurtling to leeward across the tumbling, white-grey water; while overhead, in the darkening sky, heavy, leaden-looking bunches of cloud, streaked with the white wisps of mares' tails, and torn and fretted by the wind, came sailing rapidly down from windward on the wings of the gale.

The destroyers, tugging and straining at their buoys, all had steam up and anchors ready for letting go, lest, by some unfortunate chance their moorings should part and they should find themselves adrift and helpless. Such things have been known to happen for want of the necessary precautions. Even as it was, the spray came flying in sheets across their low decks when the tide swung them across the sea and the wind.

The *Triptolemus* happened to be lying close to the *Mariner*, and I, having been ashore earlier in the afternoon with Dick, the Sealyham, had hastened back when the weather got worse. But even so, my own ship had already hoisted her boats, and I only just succeeded in catching the *Mariner's* motor-boat, which happened to be waiting at the jetty. So now, through no fault of my own, I was weather-bound on board that hospitable vessel. I knew her officers of old, and could not have wished for better company.

Down below everything was snug and warm, and in the ward-

room, Peter Wooten, her commanding officer, stood with his back to the blazing stove. 'Looks as if you'd have to spend the night here,' he said to me, glancing out of a tightly closed scuttle as a particularly heavy squall struck the ship. 'Weather's getting worse every minute. Thank Heaven we're not at sea!'

'Amen to that, sir,' murmured the first-lieutenant, engrossed in *La Vie Parisienne* in the depths of an arm-chair. 'Lord! wouldn't our little "Ikey" be sick?'

'Not so much of your "Ikey," Number One,' growled Thompson, the engineer-lieutenant-commander, who rather resented a nickname which he really did not deserve. 'Anyhow,' he added with a yawn, 'I'd far sooner be an Israelite than a Glasgow Highlander!'

M'Donald, the first-lieutenant, proud of his nationality, deposited his paper in a place of safety, rose to his feet, buttoned this coat, and, without saying another word, fell upon the engineer.

'Scrap! Scrap!' howled the sub. joyfully, as the combatants, locked in each other's arms, fell violently on to the settee in close proximity to the sleeping Sealyham. 'Up and at 'em!'

He hurled himself from his chair and into the fray without quite knowing or caring which side he proposed to fight on; while Dick, forgetting his manners, and equally excited, pranced eagerly round on the outskirts of the battle, barking furiously and snapping playfully at anything within reach.

'Behave yourselves, you devils!' laughed Wooten, hurling a cushion into the midst of the fight, and jumping aside to avoid a waving leg. 'Play light, children. Play light!'

For some moments the 'children,' struggling and panting heavily, with the engineer underneath, the first-lieutenant above him, and the sub. on top of the lot, fought lustily on the settee in a maze of whirling arms and legs. Then Dick, seizing his opportunity, dashed in and got his jaws to work.

'Ow!' yelled the first-lieutenant. 'The little brute's got me by the breeches! Let go, you chaps! He's tearing 'em to bits!'

The struggle terminated abruptly, and the combatants, disentangling themselves, rose to their feet, flushed, breathless, and laughing.

'Serve you jolly well right, Number One,' gasped Thompson, adjusting his torn collar. 'Even Dick knows you for a heathen!'

M'Donald laughed good-humouredly. 'All right, Ikey dear,' he panted, rather red about the face. 'You got the worst of it, anyhow.'

'Did I?' guffawed the engineer. 'Look at your brecks.'

The Scalyham's teeth were sharp, and he had torn one leg of the first-lieutenant's trousers almost to the knee.

'Well, I'll be jiggered!' he exclaimed, examining the damage with a rueful expression. 'They're my second-best pair!'

Everybody laughed; while Dick, slobbering profusely, wagged his tail and grinned in his usual doggish way. 'After all,' he seemed to be saying, 'I may be a guest; but if my superior officers amuse themselves by pretending to fight, why shouldn't I join in?'

Why not, indeed?

On the mess-deck forward the men comported themselves with rather more dignity. There was a certain amount of noise, it is true, for many of them were talking at the top of their voices; a gramophone was raucously grinding out 'Dixie'; and in the far corner the members of a very much home-made orchestra, composed of one man with a mouth-organ and another with a penny whistle, were trying hard to get their respective instruments to synchronise in time and tune. Another man helped them with an occasional tympanic accompaniment beaten out on the bottom of a tin mess-kettle, and his efforts, combined with those of the gentleman with the whistle, who could not play a little bit, were penetrating, to say the least of it.

Another A.B. was busily embroidering a cushion-cover in Berlin wool on canvas. It was quite a work of art, and included a crown, a portrait of His Majesty surrounded with a wreath of roses, thistles, shamrocks, and leeks in their proper colouring, the flags of all the Allies, and the words 'RULE BRITANNIA' in gold, all on a ground of vivid emerald green. It was much admired, and on completion the industrious maker intended to present it to his young lady. Close alongside him a friend was hard at work cutting out a photograph-frame with a fret-saw, and farther up the table a man was doing something to a pair of trousers with a sewing-machine. The remainder slept, read, or wrote letters, as the spirit moved them; but the sleepers predominated, in spite of the noise.

At the foremost table on the starboard side sat Leading Seaman Joshua Billings and William Martin. A.B. Billings, a short, stout, red-faced fellow, with a voice like an asthmatic corn-crake, was pretending to read a yellow-backed magazine. In reality, he had just consumed a very satisfactory tea, and was feeling extremely replete and comfortable—so replete, in fact, that his head nodded, and the printed pages danced before his half-closed eyes.

Martin, generally known as 'Pincher', was sprawling with his elbows on the white wooden table, gazing every now and then at the ceiling for inspiration, for he was endeavouring to write a letter.



Pincher was a smaller man than his neighbour, lightly built and rather thin, but his clear complexion and eyes, and alert manner and movements, showed that he enjoyed the best of health.

'Ere, Josh,' he asked, sucking the end of his pen, and nudging his burly friend in the ribs, 'ow d'you spell affectionate?'

Joshua opened his eyes. 'Ow d'you spell wot?' he demanded rather testily. 'Carn't you leave a bloke alone for a minit? You've done nothin' but ask me 'ow to spell words since you started writin'! You've bin to school, ain't you?'

'Course I 'as. But 'ow d'you spell it?'

'Spell wot?'

'Affectionate.'

Billings thought for a moment: 'AFFEXUN, affection—ATE, ain't it, fat-head?'

Pincher wrote it down and stared at it doubtfully. 'Sounds all right,' he said, scratching his head. 'Don't look right, some'ow.'

'Good enuf, ain't it? 'Oo are you writing to, any'ow?'

'Oo do you think?'

'Your Hemmeline?'

'Course. 'Oo else d'you think?'

'I dunno wot other gals you writes to, I'm sure,' said Joshua. 'Ere, let's 'ave a look at it?' He held out a hand.

Pincher snatched his precious letter away.

'No,' he said; 'it's private.'

The leading seaman snorted. 'Privit! 'Ow can it be? Now, look 'ere, me son; you don't go 'avin' no secrets from me, mind.'

'Oh, don't I?'

'No, you bloomin' well don't. Your gal Hemmeline—your missus, that is—is my missus's daughter by 'er first 'usband, ain't she?'

'Yes.'

'An' as your missus's ma—your ma-in-law, that is,—is my missus, I'm your bloomin' pa-in-law, ain't I?'

Pincher laughed. 'I dunno so much about that,' he observed.

'Course I is,' Joshua pointed out; 'an' sein' 'ow I'm your pa-in-law, I'm the bloke wot's responsible for you. Therefore you've gotter obey wot I says, same as if I was your proper father; an' when I arks you civil to show me wot you wrote, you becomes 'ongrateful, an' says you won't. All right then,' he went on, waving a podgy hand. 'All right, 'ave it your own way; but don't come cryin' an' 'owlin' round my neck when you're in trouble. Base ingratitude's wot I calls it, arter all I done for you!'

'All you done for me,' Martin chuckled. 'I likes that. 'Oo was it 'oo borrowed 'arf-a-dollar of me last pay-day, an' ain't returned

it? 'Oo is it who arks me for 'bacca an' matches, an' says 'e ain't got none of 'is own, eh? 'Oo is it? I know it's me poor old pa-in-law. 'Is name is Josh Billings.'

Joshua, seeing that the war was being carried into his own territory, grunted in disgust, and relapsed into silence. Within five minutes, breathing stertorously, he was fast asleep.

Pincher, smiling to himself, completed his letter with two rows of crosses, stamped and addressed the envelope, and leaving it open, placed it in the letter-box. It, with many others, would presently be read and passed by the unfortunate officer whose duty it was to censor all the private correspondence leaving the ship, and even the most intimate letters to wives and sweethearts were not exempt from his rigid scrutiny.

Two minutes later, however, another diversion was caused by the sudden arrival on the mess-deck of a breathless, red-faced signalman, whose oilskins dripped with wet.

'Ullo, Buntin!' somebody asked apprehensively, eyeing the signal-pad in the new-comer's hand. 'What's the racket now?'

'I knows,' said another man glumly. 'We raises steam for full speed with the utmost despatch, an' goes to sea to 'unt Fritzies. Lawd,' he added, 'wot a night to be out on th' rollin' waves!'

The signalman smiled blandly. 'Any o' you blokes fancy a drop o' leaf?' he inquired, ignoring his questioners.

'Leaf! 'Oo said leaf?' grunted Billings, waking up at the mere mention of the word. 'Garn! We 'aven't 'ad no leaf for months, an' months, an' months, as th' song says, an' ain't likely to, neither!'

'All right, then,' said Bunting. 'Listen to this signal just come through: "Raise steam by seven o'clock in the morning. *Mariner* will proceed to refit at. . . Orders are being sent." How's that for a bit of all right?'

'Sure you ain't spinnin' yarns?' Pincher asked incredulously.

'Of course I'm ruddy well not! If you likes to go down to the wardroom you'll see th' skipper, an' the sub-lootenant, an' th' engineer officer, an' all the rest of 'em dancin' ring-a-ring-o'-roses round th' table. Here,' he added, thrusting the pad into Martin's hand, 'read the bloomin' signal for yourself!'

Pincher read, and was convinced.

'It's orl right, blokes,' he observed, smiling happily. 'There ain't no 'anky-panky about it. 'Strewth!' he added. 'To-day's the twenty-second o' December, an' one watch'll be 'ome for Christmas Day, an' th' other for th' Noo Year.'

'Ear, 'ear!' from the delighted Billings: while a chorus of cheers, yells, and cat-calls came from the others.

The sleepers awoke, and for the next half-hour the *Mariner's* mess-deck was in a state of howling pandemonium.

So also was the wardroom, for we spent the evening in celebration. Leave was a thing people did not often get; while leave at Christmas, the one time of the year when everybody wanted to be at home, had been unknown to most of them since 1913.

They made a night of it, and it was not until past midnight, after a friendly wrangle with Wooten, who insisted on offering me his bunk, that I retired to rest on the wardroom settee in borrowed blankets and night attire. At 6.30, after a perilous trip in the whaler, Dick and I eventually arrived on board our own ship.

Lucky *Mariner*! Leave at Christmas!

## II

Punctually at seven o'clock the *Mariner* slipped from her buoy and proceeded to sea. The weather had not improved, and once past the line of dancing buoys and the bobbing, drunken-looking red lightship at the harbour-mouth, she found the full force of the gale.

The little ship, speeding along at twenty knots into the teeth of the wind and the angry, curling sea, behaved much as usual—sometimes banged to and fro like a shuttlecock, sometimes wallowing in the welter like a half-tide rock. Clouds of spray went flying high over her bridge and her funnel, to drench everybody on deck: and occasionally, when her sharp bows fell with a thump into the heart of an oncoming wave, heavy masses of broken water came surging along the forecastle to expend their fruitless energy against the bridge and the charthouse with a series of shocks which caused the whole ship to quiver and tremble. Then the bows would lift dizzily, and the white-caps, breaking on board further aft, went racing madly along the low deck until the men had literally to hang on by their eyelids to prevent themselves from being washed overboard. The motion was abominable, for the *Mariner* leapt and pranced, pitched and rolled and wallowed, shook and quivered, all at the same time.

But who cared? Who minded being wetted to the skin and rattled about like a pea in a bandbox when 'a little drop o' leaf' was looming up in the offing? They were off to refit at a dockyard; and the refit, judging from the number of defects which had to be made good, would take at least a fortnight. Fourteen whole days? That meant seven days' leave for every officer and man aboard.

Most of them had not set eyes on their wives, families, parents,

relations, best girls, or whomever else they took interest in, for months. Some of the men had hardly set foot ashore since the last time the ship refitted, and had been industriously saving up their monthly wages against the time when, the accumulated 'Bradburys' crackling merrily in their pockets, they would be able to make a glorious and most satisfactory splash with their hard-earned money, and d— all expense.

Every soul on the ship had his own ideas on the subject of leave. Peter Wooten, the lieutenant-commander, would meet his wife in London, and spend three or four days at an hotel. They would do several theatres, and spend much money on taxi-cabs, while Mrs. Peter would most certainly intimate her desire to do some shopping, as she hadn't 'a rag fit to be seen in.' She always seemed to run out of respectable garments when Peter went on leave, for she knew well enough that her husband, delighted at seeing her again, would forget all about her overdrawn dress allowance and provide the wherewithal. But, as a *quid pro quo*, she usually insisted on buying him some thick woollen undervests to keep him warm at sea; but the ungatetui! recipient, who hated above all things spending money on undergarments and travelling, generally put off the replenishment of his own depleted wardrobe until the last possible moment. When the shopping had all been done, they would spend the rest of the time in visiting other people's houses, where Peter, without being indiscreet or giving away State secrets, would do his best to answer innumerable questions as to what the navy were really doing, and how many U-boats had been sunk during the previous month.

The sub., irrepressible and impecunious, had arranged to have a gay time in the Metropolis with the surgeon-probationer for just as long as their joint finances permitted it. The doc. was eminently capable of acting as the sub.'s bear-leader, for before the war and his appearance in naval uniform he had been a student at a London hospital, where, at some remote period, when hostilities ceased, he would have to return to pass his final examinations before being launched forth as a fully qualified medico. But what he did not know about London was hardly worth talking about. He knew of a cabman's shelter where, at two o'clock in the morning, and for the modest sum of tenpence, one might, before the days of rationing, procure a huge plate of fried eggs and bacon. By reason of a friendship with a member of the Metropolitan police, moreover, he was by way of being an honorary member of a police canteen where they sold excellent beer in jugs, and sausages and mashed potatoes. There were quite a lot of things he had learnt as a medical student.

But he did not intend personally to conduct the sub. to cabmen's shelters and policemen's canteens. Oh dear, no!

They would take rooms at the same hotel, and, rising at ten o'clock in the morning, would live a life of luxury and ease. They would see every revue and musical comedy in London, and then, having lived for three glorious days at the rate of three thousand pounds a year, would shake the dust of the city off their feet, and spend the rest of their leave in the bosoms of their respective families.

The men, of course, would scatter to the four winds of heaven, some to their beloved 'Pompey', where, since the *Mariner* had a Portsmouth crew, a good many of them had their homes. Others would gravitate to London, or to their parents or their families in the depths of rural England; while the half dozen Royal Naval Reserve men—MacLeods, MacIvers, and other Macs—would request and obtain forty-eight hours' leave extension to enable them to visit their homes in their own native Scotland.

Leading Seaman Joshua Billings and 'Pincher' Martin, A.B., had a joint establishment at Weymouth. I say they had it, but it was not actually theirs. It really belonged to Mrs. Billings, and consisted of quite a prosperous little newspaper, tobacco and sweet shop. Before her marriage to Joshua, Mrs. Billings had been Mrs. Figgins, the relict of a cab-driver; and as Joshua himself was on the verge of retiring from the navy when he married her just before the war, he would not hear of the business being given up. Indeed, though undoubtedly fond of his wife, he had also an idea for the main chance. He had long been on the look-out for some fairly easy method of supplementing his small pension, and the substantial charms of the lady with a satisfactory little business of her own were too good to be missed. To tell the truth, he rather looked forward to the day when, as a gentleman at large in a billycock hat and a 'civvy' suit, he should lend the light of his countenance to the establishment, and himself pass the time of day with the more influential customers whilst serving them with their packets of cigarettes and newspapers. 'It's allus a good thing for a poor widdy-woman to 'ave a man about the house,' he had pointed out when pressing his suit for the heart and hand of his adored one; and Mrs. Figgins, being evidently of the same opinion herself, blushed rosily and consented to become Mrs. Billings.

Mrs. 'Pincher' Martin, originally Emmeline Figgins, was Mrs. Billings's daughter. She was a pretty, capable-looking young woman of twenty-one, with attractive blue eyes, a fascinating *retroussé* nose, a mass of golden hair, and a habit of saying exactly what she thought. At the outset, during the 'walking out' or courting stage, the course of Pincher's one and only real love affair had

not run exactly smooth, but after getting to know each other the two young things had become very devoted—so devoted that they were married within a month of Martin's release from the Royal Naval Hospital at Haslar, where he had been recovering from a wound received in the battle of Jutland.

Pincher and his wife had no separate establishment of their own. As Joshua was necessarily at sea until the termination of the war, mother and daughter lived together. But Martin had been given to understand that he could come and go as he pleased. The arrangement suited him admirably, for, though he contributed a certain weekly sum towards household expenses, it was far cheaper for him than if Emmeline had a house or lodgings of her own. Moreover, everybody concerned preferred it.

The little *menage à deux*, which became a *menage à quatre* whenever Joshua and Pincher obtained leave at the same time, was a happy one. The men themselves were never there long enough for there to be any signs of discord or friction in the domestic arrangements, so Weymouth was the one place in the United Kingdom which was ever in their thoughts.

The trip was a bad one, and bitterly cold; and the short winter day was again drawing in when the *Mariner*, her funnels caked white with dried salt, her decks covered with a layer of ice from the frozen spray, and icicles pendant from her mast, rigging, and guns, steamed up the river on the last few miles of her journey. She arrived in the midst of a heavy snow-squall, in which it was impossible to see more than two hundred yards; but, feeling his way cautiously from buoy to buoy, Wooten took her up the tortuous estuary, and made her fast to a mooring-buoy off the dockyard.

At eight o'clock the next morning the lockgates opened to receive her, and steaming into the basin, escorted by a couple of snorting, fussy-looking dockyard tugs, vomiting forth clouds of noisome black smoke, the destroyer was berthed alongside a wall. Steam was allowed to die down, and at once the ship was invaded by various harassed-looking officials and overseers armed with indelible pencils and defect lists, and hordes of dockyard 'mates' with their donkeys or tool-chests. They arrived not singly but in dozens. Workmen of every imaginable trade—shipwrights, horny-handed sons of toil from the engineering and constructive departments, carpenters, plumbers, caulkers, riveters, blacksmiths, painters, riggers and many more. But they were an orderly mob, for they all knew what to do and where to do it, and presently the ship resounded to the thudding and clanging of hammers as they explored her inner recesses and removed various parts of machinery

in whose welfare they were interested. They were working against time, and ere long the upper deck, already covered in black mud, became littered with a heterogeneous mass of pipes and parts of machinery filched from the bowels of the ship, which would soon be carried off in hand-carts to be refitted and renovated in the dockyard workshops. The ship seemed to be in a state of rapid disintegration, and Wooten, coming back on deck and seeing the litter of untidiness, heaved a sigh of deep disgust.

But a vessel always looks forlorn and forsaken in a dockyard. In her natural element, the sea, she is a thing of life, a beautiful thing of flesh and blood with a very decided will of her own, whose every whim or idiosyncrasy must be humoured or combated. In a dockyard, however, lying alongside a wall, she seems to lose her entity. Her individuality vanishes, and she becomes for the time being an inert and helpless hull, a faded and bedraggled beauty of chastened appearance, doing her best to appear respectable.

Wooten tramped off through the snow and slush to report his ship's arrival to the commander-in-chief of the port and the admiral superintendent. They were both affability itself, and the kind-hearted C.-in-C. was very indulgent over the matter of leave.

'Send your proposals in to me,' he said, 'but remember that I like both officers and men to get away for as long as they possibly can. It must be pretty cold at sea, nowadays, eh?' he added, standing with his back to a roaring fire and gazing at the snow beating against the windows.

'It is, sir,' Wooten agreed.

The admiral smiled and nodded. 'Right,' he said. 'Send your people away as soon as you can spare them. Good-morning.'

He understood what leave meant; he had been a junior officer himself not so many years ago.

### III

And so it came to pass that, late on Christmas Eve, Joshua Billings and Pincher Martin, each clad in his most immaculate raiment, and each carrying a small bundle done up in a blue-striped handkerchief, arrived at the London and South-Western Railway Company's terminus at Waterloo. They arrived in some style—in a taxi-cab with their feet upon the seats opposite; and, if the truth be known, they had rather dallied by the way, for with the greater number of the other liberty men from the *Mariner*, they had arrived in London at 5.57. It was now 10.43

But still, as Joshua had pointed out, Christmas comes but once a

year, and a week's leave comes barely more often; so the Mariners, before separating to King's Cross, Liverpool Street, Euston, Victoria, Paddington and other London termini, *en route* for their homes, had foregathered at various places of refreshment to celebrate the festive season and their temporary independence. So at 10.43, when Billings and Pincher arrived at Waterloo, they were both feeling happy with themselves and the world in general.

After over-paying the taxi-cabman in a manner which excited that worthy's profound admiration, they marched solemnly on to the platform to inquire about the trains for Weymouth. The next one left at 11.55, they were informed by an inspector, who rather objected to being clapped on the back and addressed as 'old cock' and 'Mister Funnyface', so they had over an hour to wait.

'Look 'ere,' Joshua remonstrated with the official; 'me an' Pincher don't want to wait an hour, see? 'Aven't you got a hengine ready w' steam up for full speed as'll give us a passage? It'll be 'arf-a-dollar for you if you kin fix it up.'

'Don't waste my time,' snapped the inspector, peevish and irritable after a long day's work and the extra Christmas traffic. 'Who are you trying to bribe? You know very well you can't have an engine.'

'Orl right, old son,' retorted the irrepressible Billings. 'Don't you go gettin' dizzy júst becós I asks a civil question. I'm a infloential share-'older in your company, an' if you don't be'ave I'll report you, an' 'ave you disrated to porter. See if I don't!'

'I don't care who you are!' rejoined the harassed official.

'Oh, chuck it!' Pincher broke in, anxious to avert a quarrel. ''Ere, 'ave a bit of ship's bacca, an' let's make friends.' He fumbled in his bundle, and produced a couple of inches of black navy plug, which he thrust into the man's hand.

'Don't mind if I do,' said the inspector, rather more affably, placing the gift in his tail pocket. 'Thanks, very much.'

'Look 'ere, young fella,' said Billings, seized by a sudden and brilliant inspiration. 'I wants to buy a turkey for th' missus.'

'Turkey!' smiled the railway-man. 'You'll get no turkeys at this time of night.'

Joshua seemed somewhat disconsolate. 'Isn't there no shops near 'ere where they sells 'em?' he inquired.

'There's Cox's the poulterer's, in Charlotte Street, not more than a couple of hundred yards from the entrance to the station. But he'll be shut by now.'

'We'll ruddy soon make 'im open,' Billings replied. ''Ow do we get there, old son?'



The directions were duly given, the inspector was wished good night and a happy Christmas, and ten minutes later two respectable members of His Majesty's naval forces might have been seen holding an anxious colloquy in the dark street outside the shuttered establishment of Mr. Ebenezer Cox, fish and poultry merchant.

They spent several minutes hammering at the side-door without avail, and then, raising their voices, shouted in unison.

'Strike me!' exclaimed Pincher, breathing heavily. 'There don't seem to be nobody in the 'ouse, or else they're all dead, or drunk, or somethin'. What'll we do, Josh?'

'Eave bricks at their ruddy windows an' wake 'em up,' Joshua replied promptly, groping in the gutter for the necessary missiles. 'It's downright disgraceful th' time some of these 'ere shore-going folk turns in!'

But not a vestige of a stone or a pebble could be found, nothing but an ancient banana skin and a rusty sardine-tin.

'We'll 'ave to give it up, Pincher boy,' said Joshua at last. 'I can't find nothin' to 'eave.'

Martin thought for a moment. 'Look 'ere, Josh. Can you sing?'

'Sing! Me! Wot d'you take me for—a ruddy canary-bird, or wot?'

'Ardly, chum. But we might pretend we was carol-singers.'

Billings burst out into a raucous laugh, but he saw the force of the suggestion. 'It ain't much in my line,' he said, wiping his lips. 'My singin' ain't wot it used to be. What'll we sing?'

"Good King Wenceslas," said Pincher, who thought he could rely on his memory for the words of the first verse.

'Good King 'oo?' asked Joshua, in some perplexity.

'Wenceslas. If you don't know the words, just follow me an' 'um the toon.'

'Orl right. Start 'er up.'

Pincher cleared his throat and began, Billings chiming in with a series of throaty bass rumbles which bore a distinct resemblance to the blasts of a cracked trombone or the fog siren of a lightship.

*'Good King Wenceslas looked out  
On the feast of Stephen,  
When the snow lay round about,  
Deep and crisp and even.  
Brightly shone the moon that night,  
But the frost was cru-e-el,  
When a pore man'—*

The carol was rudely interrupted by the sudden opening of a top window and the emergence of an elderly female head.

'Go away!' it shrilled. 'We don't want none o' your kind 'ere. Why can't you let respectable folk alone, instead o' 'ammering at their doors and 'owling' outside their 'ouses at this time o' night?'

'Orl right, missus,' returned the unperturbed Billings. 'We didn't mean no 'arm. We was merely attractin' your attention. We wants to buy a turkey.'

'Turkey! I haven't got no turkeys. Besides, the shop's been shut this hour or more, and my husband's in bed with the toothache.'

'Look 'ere, ole darlin',' Pincher put in; 'we're two pore, starvin' sailors wot's been defendin' our country. We've just been given a week's leaf, and we wants a nice li'l turkey to take 'ome for Christmas. We've got our meat tickets.'

'You can't 'ave one,' said the voice, but rather more agreeably. 'We've nothing but geese left, and them's three-and-two a pound.'

'Don't care if they're three-and-six,' said the opulent Joshua. 'Come on, old gal, put on your dressin'-gown an' let's 'ave one.'

The head withdrew, and they heard the sounds of conversation within the room.

'All right,' said the lady, popping her head out of the window again like a jack-in-the-box. 'My 'usband says you can 'ave a goose. I'll be down in a minute.'

'Now then, what's all the row about?' came another voice from the street, as the gleam from a bull's-eye lamp fell on the two blue-jackets.

'We're buying a goose, sergeant dear,' said Billings, recognising the helmeted figure of a policeman. 'Me an' my chum, Pincher'—

'You can't come making disturbances at this time o' night,' the constable interrupted gruffly. 'I heard a row like somebody being strangled, and came along to see what was up. Go home quiet, can't you?'

'Our train don't leave till 11.55,' Pincher observed.

The policeman grunted. 'You're sailors, aren't you?' he asked, flashing his lamp on their cap-ribbons.

'We're matloes, if that's wot you mean, ole son.' Joshua agreed.

'Know an A.B. of the name o' Horrigan?' asked the policeman.

'Orrigan?' said Pincher, racking his brains. 'Is 'e a fat feller with a ginger beard?'

'No. Long chap, clean shaven, with black hair. He's serving along o' Admiral Beatty in his flagship.'

'Sorry. I 'aven't met 'im.'

'He's my brother,' the constable said. 'When he comes on leave

he gives me a bit o' tobacco now and then. Good stuff, navy tobacco.'

Billings promptly turned his back and studied the landscape. Pincher laughed.

'Come on, Josh. It's your turn.'

Joshua pretended not to understand.

'My turn?' he asked, turning round. 'Wot d'you mean?'

'Th' orficer wants a bit o' 'bacca out o' your bundle. I whacked it out to the last bloke, you'll remember.'

The leading seaman, seeing no way out of the difficulty, brought out half a pound of navy plug done up in a long prick, cut off a small portion, and handed it across.

'Thanks,' said the policeman. 'Did you say you were buying a goose?'

Billings nodded.

'Want any assistance?'

'No, thanks, sergeant. The old lady's comin' down in a minit.'

'Right. I'll be getting along, then. Look out you don't make any more noise or you'll get me into trouble. Good night!'

'Lor' lumme!' Pincher murmured, as the representative of law and order marched off down the street with heavy tread. 'These 'ere London cops ain't 'arf sharks!'

They heard the sound of footsteps, and a moment later the side-door opened to disclose Mrs. Cox in an antique dressing-gown and her grey hair done up in curl-papers.

'Ere you are,' she exclaimed, thrusting a large parcel into Joshua's arms. 'Ere's the best goose we've got. Eight pounds at three-and-four; that'll be twenty-six and eightpence. Where's your meat ticket?'

'Ere,' said Joshua, fumbling in his cap. 'But, 'arf-a-mo, ma. Didn't you say three-and-two a pound? And 'ow do we know wot 'is weight is? We 'aven't seen 'im on the scales.'

'No; and you won't see 'im on the scales,' retorted the lady with some acerbity. 'You can't expect me to get weighin' things at this time o' night!'

'An' wot about the money? You said three-and-two a pound.'

'Did I?' she snapped. 'Well, I made a mistake. I should have said three-and-four. 'Ow much longer d'you mean to keep me 'ere? Where's your tickets?'

Joshua handed them across. 'Got your money ready, Pincher?' he asked.

'Money! Wot money?'

'For this 'ere goose, fat-'ead!'

'It was you 'oo ordered it!' Pincher retorted with some warmth.

'Me!' in a voice of deepest surprise.

'And I'll be catchin' me death o' cold if I stand 'ere much longer,' put in the scantily attired lady. 'Pay me wot you owe me and clear out.'

Billings, murmuring fiercely to himself, fumbled in his trousers-pocket. 'Ere you are, missus,' he said, reluctantly extracting a pound and a ten-shilling note. 'I wants three and fourpence change.'

'Aven't got no change,' said Mrs. Cox, taking the money with alacrity.

'Well, give us somethin' instead,' replied the magnanimous Billings. 'And when you're done with it, I wants me meat ticket back.'

The woman retreated, and presently reappeared with a moist odoriferous parcel done up in newspaper. 'Ere you are, young man,' she said, pushing it at Pincher. 'There's some nice dried 'addicks for your breakfuss.—Here's your meat card, Mister Fatty. Good night!'

'Mister 'cw nuch?' Billings demanded.

'Fatty,' snapped Mrs. Cox, slamming the door in their faces, presently to retire chuckling to bed, well satisfied with the night's business.

Joshua and his friend, clasping their purchases, made their way back to the station.

'Strewth!' Pincher murmured, sniffing his parcel dubiously. 'These 'ere fish smells somethin' 'orrid! I believe we've been done, Josh.'

'I expect we 'ave, mate,' his friend agreed mournfully. 'Wot wi' being robbed right and left, and insulted, an' most of me meat coupons pinched, I can see London's no place for the likes of us!'

#### IV

The train was exasperatingly slow, and it was not until nearly dawn on Christmas morning that Joshua and Pincher, halting outside the newspaper-shop at Weymouth, deposited their belongings on the doorstep and proceeded to bombard the establishment with gravel and small stones.

The reply was immediately forthcoming, for a window shot up and a head with two long plaits of hair pendant from it looked out. 'Who's there?'

'Don't you know your own 'usband?' Pincher howled, recognising his wife. 'Ere's Joshua, too. We've got a week's leaf!'

'Why didn't you tell us you were coming?' Emmeline asked excitedly. 'Lawks! Won't mother be pleased!'

'Thought we'd give you both a surprise, me dear.' Joshua laughed. 'Come on, me gal. Shake a leg. Roust out yer ma, an' let us in.'

She needed little encouragement, for the head withdrew, there came the sound of scuttering footsteps and conversation from inside, and presently the door opened, and Joshua and Pincher fell into the arms of their respective wives.

'Oh Bill!' Emmeline sighed happily, dragging her man into the little parlour at the back of the shop, and putting her arms round his neck. 'I *am* pleased to see you!'

Pincher's mouth was too full of her hair to answer, but his arms were around her soft waist, and he squeezed her until she gasped for breath, and told him to 'give over.'

Joshua and his better-half were doing the same thing in the shop itself.

But the goose, a venerable bird which had evidently passed its long life in walking from John o' Groats to Land's End, was tough, lean, and very stringy; while the haddocks were consigned uncooked to the dustbin, where they were presently discovered by the cat from next door.

'Oh, you men!' Mrs. Billings murmured reprovingly, her eyes misty with happiness. 'You're nothing but a lot o' babies when it comes to spending your money. I dunno' where you'd be if you hadn't got wives to look after you.'

Joshua laughed, and Pincher, with Emmeline sitting on his knee, quite agreed.

## THE HEART'S DESIRE

BY H. M. TOMLINSON

IF the evening was one of those which seem longer than usual, but still have far to go, it was once a custom in Millwall to find a pair of boots of which it could be claimed that it was time they were mended, and to carry the artful parcel round to Mr. Pascoe. His cobbler's shop was in a street that had the look of having retired from the hurry and press of London, aged, dispirited, and indifferent even to its defeat, and of waiting vacantly for what must come to elderly and shabby despondence. Each grey house in the street was distinguished but by its number and the ornament which showed between the muslin curtains of its parlour window. The home of the Jones's had a geranium, and so was different from one neighbour with a ship's model in gypsum, and from the other whose sign was a faded photograph askew in its frame. On warm evenings some of the women would be sitting on their doorsteps, watching with dull faces their children at play, as if experience had told them more than they wanted to know, but that they had nothing to say about it. Beyond this street there was emptiness. It ended, literally, on a blind wall. It was easy for a wayfarer to feel in that street that its life was caught. It was secluded from the main stream, and its children were a lively yet merely revolving eddy. They could not get out. When I first visited Mr. Pascoe, as there was no window ornament to distinguish his place from the others, and his number was missing, I made a mistake, and went next door. Through a hole drilled in that wrong door a length of cord was pendant, with a greasy knot at its end. Underneath the knot was chalked 'Pull'. I pulled. The door opened on a mass of enclosed night. From the street it was hard to see what was there, so I went inside. What was there might have been a cavern—narrow, obscure, and dangerous with dim obstructions. Some of the shadows were darker than others, because the cave ended, far-off, on a port-light, a small square of day framed in black. Empty space was luminous beyond that cave. Becoming used to the gloom I saw chains and cordage hanging from the unseen roof. What was faintly like the prow of a boat shaped near. Then out from the lumber and suggestions of things a gnome approached

me. 'Y' want old Pascoe? Nex' dore, guv'nor!' At that moment, in the square of bright day at the end of the darkness, the apparition of a ship silently appeared, and was gone again before my surprise. That open space beyond was London River.

Next door, in a small room to which day and night were the same, Mr. Pascoe was always to be found bending over his hobbling foot under a tiny yellow fan of gaslight which could be heard making a tenuous shrilling whenever the bootmaker looked up, and ceased riveting. When his head was bent over his task only the crown of a red and matured cricketing cap, which nodded in time to his hammer, was presented to you. When he paused to speak, and glanced up, he showed a face that the gas-jet, with the aid of many secluded years, had tintured with its own artificial hue, a face puckered through a long frowning intent on old boots. He wore an apron that had ragged gaps in it. He was a frail and dingy little man, and might never have had a mother, but could have been born of that dusty workroom, to which he had been a faithful son all his life. It was a murky interior shut in from the day, a litter of petty tools and nameless rubbish on a ruinous bench, a disorder of dilapidated boots, that mean gas-jet, a smell of leather; and there old Pascoe's hammer defiantly and rapidly attacked its circumstances, driving home at times, and all unseen, more than those rivets. If he rose to rake over his bench for material or a tool, he went spryly, aided by a stick, but at every step his body heeled over because one leg was shorter than the other. Having found what he wanted he would wheel round, with a strange agility that was apparently a consequence of his deformity, continuing his discourse, and driving his points into the air with his hammer, and so hobble back, still talking; still talking through his funny cap, as his neighbours used to say of him. At times he convoluted aerial designs and free ideas with his hammer, spending it aloft on matters superior to boots. The boots were never noticed. Pascoe could revivify his dust. The glitter of his spectacles when he looked up might have been the sparkling of an ardent vitality suppressed in his little body.

The wall space of his room was stratified with shelves, where half-seen bottles and nondescript lumps were to be guessed at, like fossils embedded in shadow. They had never been moved, and they never would be. Hanging from a nail on one shelf was a framed lithograph of the ship *Euterpe*, off S. Catherine's Point, July 21, 1849. On the shelf below the picture was a row of books. I never saw Pascoe look at them, and they could have been like the bottles, retained by a careful man because of a notion that some day they would come in handy. Once, when waiting for Pascoe, who was out getting a little

beer, I glanced at the volumes, and supposed they bore some relation to the picture of the ship; perhaps once they had been owned by that legendary brother of Pascoe's, a sailor, of whom I had had a misty apprehension. It would be difficult to say there had been a direct word about him. There were manuals on navigation, seamanship, and shipbuilding, all of them curiosities, in these later days, rather than expert guides. They were full of marginal notes, and were not so dusty as I had expected to find them. The rest of the books were of journeys in Central America and Mexico: *Three Years in Guatemala*; *The Buried Cities of Yucatan*; *Scenes on the Mosquito Coast*; *A Voyage to Honduras*. There was more of it, and of that sort. They were by authors long forgotten; but those books, too, looked as though they were often in use. Certainly they could not be classed with the old glue-pots and the lumber.

It was long after my first visit to Pascoe that he referred to those books. 'Somebody told me,' he said one evening, while offering me a share of his beer, 'that you have been to the American tropics.'

I told him I could say I had been, but little more. I said it was a very big world.

'Yes,' he said, after a pause: 'and what a world. Think of those buried cities in Yucatan—lost in the forest, temples and gods and everything. Men and women there, once upon a time, thinking they were a fine people, the only great people, with a king and princesses and priests who made out they knew the mysteries, and what God was up to. And there were processions of girls with fruit and flowers on feast-days, and soldiers in gold armour. All gone, even their big notions. Their god hasn't got even a name now. Have you ever read the *Companion of Columbus*?'

I was as surprised as though one of his dim bottles in the shadows had suddenly glowed before my eyes, become magical with moving opalescence. What right had old Pascoe to be staring like that to the land and romance of the Toltecs? I had been under the impression that he read nothing but the Bible and *Progress and Poverty*. There was a biography of Bradlaugh, too, which he would quote copiously, and his spectacles used fairly to scintillate over that, and his yellow face to acquire a new set of cunning and ironic puckers; for I believe he thought, when he quoted Bradlaugh—whose name was nearly all I knew of the famous man—that he was becoming extremely modern, and a little too strong for my conventional and sensitive mind. But here he was, talking of Incas, Aztecs, and Toltecs, of buried cities, of forgotten treasures, though mainly of the mind, of Montezuma, of the quetzal bird, and of the vanished splendour of nations that are now but a few weathered stones. It was the forlorn



stones, lost in an uninhabited wilderness, to which he constantly returned. A brother of his, who had been there, perhaps had dropped a word once into Pascoe's ear while his accustomed weapon was uplifted over a dock-labourer's boot-heel, and this was what that word had done. Pascoe, with a sort of symbolic gesture, rose from his hobbling foot before me, tore the shoe from it, flung it contemptuously on the floor, and approached me with a flamboyant hammer.

And that evening I feared for a moment that Pascoe was spoiled for me. He had admitted me to a close view of some secret treasured charms of his memory, and believing that I was not uninterested, now, of course, he would be always displaying, for the ease of his soul, supposing we had a fellowship and a bond, his fascinating quetzals and Toltecs. Yet I never heard any more about them. There was another subject though, quite homely, seeing where we both lived, and equally absorbing for us both. He knew our local history, as far as our ships and house-flags were concerned, from John Company's fleet to the *Macquarie*. He knew, by reputation, many of our contemporary master mariners. He knew, and how he had learned it was as great a wonder as though he spoke Chinese, a fair measure of naval architecture. He could discuss ships' models as some men would Greek drama. He would enter into the comparative merits of rig suitable for small cruising craft with a peculiarity which, now and then, gave me a feeling almost akin to alarm; because in a man of Pascoe's years this fond insistence on the best furniture for one's own little ship went beyond fair interest, and became the day-dreaming of romantic and rebellious youth. At that point he was beyond my depth. I had forgotten long ago, though but half Pascoe's age, what my ship was to be like, when I got her at last. Knowing she would never be seen at her moorings, I had, in a manner of speaking, posted her as a missing ship.

One day I met at his door the barge-builder into whose cavernous loft I had stumbled on my first visit to Pascoe. He said it was a fine afternoon. He invited me in to inspect a figure-head he had purchased. 'How's the old 'un?' he asked, jerking a thumb towards the bootmaker's. Then, with some amused winking and crafty tilting of his chin, he signed to me to follow him along his loft. He led me clean through the port-light of his cave, and down a length of steps outside to his yard on the foreshore of the Thames, where, among his barges hauled up for repairs, he paused by a formless shape covered by tarpaulins.

'I've seen a few things in the way of boats, but this 'ere's a—well, what do you make of it?' He pulled the tarpaulin back, and disclosed a vessel whose hull was nearing completion. I did not ask if it

was Pascoe's work. It was such an amusing and pathetic surprise, that, with the barge-builder's leering face turned to me waiting for my guess, there was no need to answer. 'He reckons,' said the barge-builder, 'that he can do a bit of cruising about the mouth of the Thames in that. 'Bout all she wants now is to have a mast fitted, and to keep the water out, and she'll do.' He chuckled grimly. Her lines were crude, and she had been built up, you could see, as Pascoe came across timber that was anywhere near being possible. Her strakes were a patchwork of various kinds of wood, though when she was tarred their diversity would be hidden from all but the searching of the elements. It was astonishing that Pascoe had done so well. It was still more astonishing that he should think it would serve.

'I've given him a hand with it,' remarked the barge-builder, 'an' more advice than the old 'un 'ud take. But I dessay 'e could potter about with the dam' tub round about as far as Canvey, if 'e keeps it out of the wash of the steamers. He's been at this job two years now, and I shan't be sorry to see my yard shut of it. . . . Must humour the old boy, though. . . . Nigglin' job, mending boots, I reckon. If I mended boots, I'd 'ave to let orf steam summow. Or go on the booze.'

I felt hurt that Pascoe had not taken me into his confidence, and that his ship, so far as I was concerned, did not exist. One Saturday evening, when I called, his room was in darkness. Striking a match, there was his apron shrouding his hobbing foot. This had never happened before, and I turned into the barge-builder's. The proprietor there faced me silently for a moment, treasuring a jest he was going to give me when I was sufficiently impatient for it. 'Come to see whether your boots are done? Well, they ain't. Pascoe's gone. Christened his boat this morning, and pushed off. Gone for a trial trip. Gone down river.'

'Good Lord,' I said, or something of the sort.

'Yes,' continued the barge-builder, luxuriating in it, 'and I've often wondered what name he'd give her, and he done it this morning, in gold leaf. D'yer remember what she looked like? All right. Well, 'er name is the *Heart's Desire*, and her skipper will be back soon, if she don't fall apart too far off.'

Her skipper was not back soon, nor that day. We had no news of him the next day. A few women were in his workshop, when I called, hunting about for footwear that should have been repaired and returned, but was not. 'Ere they are,' cried one. 'Ere's young Bill's boots, and nothing done to 'em. The silly old fool. Why didn't 'e tell me 'e was going to sea? 'Ow's young Bill to go to school on Monday now?' The others found their boots, all urgently wanted, and all as they were when Pascoe got them. A commination began

of light-minded cripples who took in young and innocent boots, promising them all things, and then treacherously abandoned them, to do God knew what; and so I left.

This became serious; but old Pascoe, with his *Heart's Desire*, had vanished, like his Toltecs. A week went by. The barge-builder, for whom this had now ceased to be a joke, was vastly troubled by the complete disappearance of his neighbour, and shook his head over it. Then a few lines in an evening paper, from a port on the Devon coast, looked promising, though what they wished to convey was not quite clear, for it was a humorous paragraph. But the evidence was strong enough for me, and on behalf of the barge-builder and a few others I went at once to that west-coast harbour.

It was late at night when I arrived, and bewildering with rain, total darkness, and an upheaval of cobbles in by-ways that wandered to no known purpose. But a guide presently brought me to a providential window, and quarters in the *Turk's Head*. In my room I could hear a continuous murmuring, no doubt from the saloon bar below, and occasional rounds of hearty merriment. That would be the place for news, and I went down to get it. An oil-lamp veiled in tobacco smoke was hanging from a beam of a sooty ceiling. A congregation of longshoremen, visible in the blue mist and smoky light chiefly because of their pink masks, was packed on benches round the walls. They laughed aloud again as I went in. They were regarding with indulgent interest and a little shy respect an elegant figure overlooking them, and posed negligently against the bar, on the other side of which rested the large bust of a laughing barnmaid. She was as amused as the men. The figure turned to me as I entered, and stopped its discourse at once. It ran a hand over its white brow and curly hair with a gesture of mock despair. 'Why, here comes another to share our *Heart's Desire*. We can't keep the beauty to ourselves.'

It was young Hopkins, known to every reader of the *Morning Despatch* for his volatility and omniscience. It was certainly not his business to allow any place to keep its secrets to itself; indeed, his reputation including even a capacity for humour, the world was frequently delighted with more than the place itself knew, even in secret. Other correspondents from London were also in the room. I saw them vaguely when Hopkins indicated their positions with a few graceful flourishes of his hand. They were lost in Hopkins's assurance of occupying superiority. They were looking on. 'We all got here yesterday,' explained Hopkins. 'It's a fine story, not without its funny touches. And it has come off jolly handy in a dull season when people want cheering up. We have found the Ancient Mariner. He was off yoyaging again, but his ship's magic was washed out by

heavy weather. And while beer is more plentiful than news, we hope to keep London going with some wonders of the deep.'

In the morning, before the correspondents had begun on the next instalment of their serial story, I saw Pascoe sitting up in a bed at another inn, his expenses an investment of the newspaper men. He was unsubdued. He was even exalted. He did not think it strange to see me there, though it was not difficult to guess that he had his doubts about the quality of the publicity he had attracted, and of the motive for the ardent attentions of his new and strange acquaintances from London. 'Don't be hard on me,' he begged, 'for not telling you more in London. But you're so cautious and distrustful I was going to tell you, but was uncertain what you'd say. Now I've started and you can't stop me. I've met a man here named Hopkins, who has given me some help and advice. As soon as my craft is repaired, I'm off again. It was unlucky to meet that sou'wester in July. But once out of home waters, I ought to be able to pick up the Portuguese trade wind off Finisterre, and then I'm good for the Caribbees. I'll do it. She should take no more than a fortnight to put right.'

There was no need to argue with him. The *Heart's Desire*, a centre of attraction in the place, answered any doubt I had as to Pascoe's safety. But he was humoured. Hopkins humoured him, even openly encouraged him. The *Heart's Desire* was destined for a great adventure. The world was kept in anticipation of the second departure for this strange voyage to Guatemala. The *Heart's Desire*, on the edge of a ship-repairer's yard, was tinkered, patched, refitted, made as right as she could be. The ship-repairer, the money for the work made certain for him, did what he was told, but made no comment, except to interrogate me curiously when I was about.

A spring tide, with a southerly wind, brought us to a natural conclusion. An unexpected lift of the water washed off the *Heart's Desire*, rolled her about, and left her broken on the mud. I met the journalists in a group on their way to the afternoon train, their faces still reflecting the brightness of an excellent entertainment. Hopkins took me aside. 'I've made it right with old Pascoe. He hasn't lost anything by it, you can be sure of that.' But I was looking for the cobbler, and all I wished to learn was the place where I was likely to find him. They did not know that.

Late that evening I was still looking for him, and it had been raining for hours. The streets of the village were dark and deserted. Passing one of the many inns, which were the only illumination of the village, I stumbled over a shadow on the cobbles outside. In the glow of a match I found Pascoe, drunk, with his necessary stick beside him, broken.



## THE GHOST SHIP

BY RICHARD MIDDLETON

FAIRFIELD is a little village lying near the Portsmouth Road about half-way between London and the sea. Strangers who find it by accident now and then, call it a pretty, old-fashioned place; we, who live in it and call it home, don't find anything very pretty about it, but we should be sorry to live anywhere else. Our minds have taken the shape of the inn and the church and the green, I suppose. At all events we never feel comfortable out of Fairfield.

Of course the Cockneys, with their vasty houses and their noise-ridden streets, can call us rustics if they choose, but for all that Fairfield is a better place to live in than London. Doctor says that when he goes to London his mind is bruised with the weight of the houses, and he was a Cockney born. He had to live there himself when he was a little chap, but he knows better now. You gentlemen may laugh—perhaps some of you come from London way—but it seems to me that a witness like that is worth a gallon of arguments.

Dull? Well, you might find it dull, but I assure you that I've listened to all the London yarns you have spun to-night, and they're absolutely nothing to the things that happen at Fairfield. It's because of our way of thinking and minding our own business. If one of your Londoners were set down on the green of a Saturday night when the ghosts of the lads who died in the war keep tryst with the lasses who lie in the churchyard, he couldn't help being curious and interfering, and then the ghosts would go somewhere where it was quieter. But we just let them come and go and don't make any fuss, and in consequence Fairfield is the ghostiest place in all England. Why, I've seen a headless man sitting on the edge of the well in broad daylight, and the children playing about his feet as if he were their father. Take my word for it, spirits know when they are well off as much as human beings.

Still, I must admit that the thing I'm going to tell you about was queer even for our part of the world, where three packs of ghost-hounds hunt regularly during the season, and blacksmith's great-grandfather is busy all night shoeing the dead gentlemen's horses. Now

that's a thing that wouldn't happen in London, because of their interfering ways, but blacksmith he lies up aloft and sleeps as quiet as a lamb. Once when he had a bad head he shouted down to them not to make so much noise, and in the morning he found an old guinea left on the anvil as an apology. He wears it on his watch-chain now. But I must get on with my story; if I start telling you about the queer happenings at Fairfield I'll never stop.

It all came of the great storm in the spring of '97, the year that we had two great storms. This was the first one, and I remember it very well, because I found in the morning that it had lifted the thatch of my pigsty into the widow's garden as clean as a boy's kite. When I looked over the hedge, widow—Tom Lamport's widow that was—was prodding for her nasturtiums with a daisy-grubber. After I had watched her for a little I went down to the *Fox and Grapes* to tell landlord what she had said to me. Landlord he laughed, being a married man and at ease with the sex. 'Come to that,' he said, 'the tempest has blowed something into my field. A kind of a ship I think it would be.'

I was surprised at that until he explained that it was only a ghost-ship and would do no hurt to the turnips. We argued that it had been blown up from the sea at Portsmouth, and then we talked of something else. There were two slates down at the parsonage and a big tree in Lumley's meadow. It was a rare storm.

I reckon the wind had blown our ghosts all over England. They were coming back for days afterwards with foundered horses and as footsore as possible, and they were so glad to get back to Fairfield that some of them walked up the street crying like little children. Squire said that his great-grandfather's great-grandfather hadn't looked so dead-beat since the battle of Naseby, and he's an educated man.

What with one thing and another, I should think it was a week before we got straight again, and then one afternoon I met the landlord on the green and he had a worried face. 'I wish you'd come and have a look at that ship in my field,' he said to me; 'it seems to me it's leaning real hard on the turnips. I can't bear thinking what the missus will say when she sees it.'

I walked down the lane with him, and sure enough there was a ship in the middle of his field, but such a ship as no man had seen on the water for three hundred years, let alone in the middle of a turnip-field. It was all painted black and covered with carvings, and there was a great bay window in the stern for all the world like the Squire's drawing-room. There was a crowd of little black cannon on deck and looking out of her port-holes, and she was anchored at each

end to the hard ground. I have seen the wonders of the world on picture-postcards, but I have never seen anything to equal that.

'She seems very solid for a ghost-ship,' I said, seeing the landlord was bothered.

'I should say it's a betwixt and between,' he answered, puzzling it over, 'but it's going to spoil a matter of fifty turnips, and missus she'll want it moved.' We went up to her and touched the side, and it was as hard as a real ship. 'Now there's folks in England would call that very curious,' he said.

Now I don't know much about ships, but I should think that that ghost-ship weighed a solid two hundred tons, and it seemed to me that she had come to stay, so that I felt sorry for landlord, who was a married man. 'All the horses in Fairfield won't move her out of my turnips,' he said, frowning at her.

Just then we heard a noise on her deck, and we looked up and saw that a man had come out of her front cabin and was looking down at us very peaceably. He was dressed in a black uniform set out with rusty gold lace, and he had a great cutlass by his side in a brass sheath. 'I'm Captain Bartholomew Roberts,' he said, in a gentleman's voice, 'put in for recruits. I seem to have brought her rather far up the harbour.'

'Harbour!' cried landlord; 'why, you're fifty miles from the sea.'

Captain Roberts didn't turn a hair. 'So much as that, is it?' he said coolly. 'Well, it's of no consequence.'

Landlord was a bit upset at this. 'I don't want to be unneighbourly,' he said, 'but I wish you hadn't brought your ship into my field. You see, my wife sets great store on these turnips.'

The Captain took a pinch of snuff out of a fine gold box that he pulled out of his pocket, and dusted his fingers with a silk handkerchief, in a very genteel fashion. 'I'm only here for a few months,' he said; 'but if a testimony of my esteem would pacify your good lady I should be content.' and with the words he loosed a great gold brooch from the neck of his coat and tossed it down to landlord.

Landlord blushed as red as a strawberry. 'I'm not denying she's fond of jewellery,' he said, 'but it's too much for half a sackful of turnips.' And indeed it was a handsome brooch.

The Captain laughed. 'Tut, man,' he said, 'it's a forced sale, and you deserve a good price. Say no more about it;' and nodding good-day to us, he turned on his heel and went into the cabin. Landlord walked back up the lane like a man with a weight off his mind. 'That tempest has blowed me a bit of luck,' he said; 'the missus will be main



pleased with that brooch. It's better than the blacksmith's guinea any day.'

Ninety-seven was Jubilee year, the year of the second Jubilee, you remember, and we had great doings at Fairfield, so that we hadn't much time to bother about the ghost-ship, though anyhow it isn't our way to meddle in things that don't concern us. Landlord, he saw his tenant once or twice when he was hoeing his turnips and passed the time of day, and landlord's wife wore her new brooch to church every Sunday. But we didn't mix much with the ghosts at any time, all except an idiot lad there was in the village, and he didn't know the difference between a man and a ghost, poor innocent! On Jubilee Day, however, somebody told Captain Roberts why the church bells were ringing, and he hoisted a flag and fired off his guns like a loyal Englishman. 'Tis true the guns were shotted, and one of the round shot knocked a hole in Farmer Johnstone's barn, but nobody thought much of that in such a season of rejoicing.

It wasn't till our celebrations were over that we noticed that anything was wrong in Fairfield. 'Twas shoemaker who told me first about it one morning at the *Fox and Grapes*. 'You know my great great-uncle?' he said to me.

'You mean Joshua, the quiet lad,' I answered, knowing him well.

'Quiet!' said shoemaker indignantly. 'Quiet you call him, coming home at three o'clock every morning as drunk as a magistrate and waking up the whole house with his noise.'

'Why, it can't be Joshua!' I said, for I knew him for one of the most respectable young ghosts in the village.

'Joshua it is,' said shoemaker; 'and one of these nights he'll find himself out in the street if he isn't careful.'

This kind of talk shocked me, I can tell you, for I don't like to hear a man abusing his own family, and I could hardly believe that a steady youngster like Joshua had taken to drink. But just then in came butcher Aylwin in such a temper that he could hardly drink his beer. 'The young puppy! the young puppy!' he kept on saying; and it was some time before shoemaker and I found out that he was talking about his ancestor that fell at Senlac.

'Drink?' said shoemaker hopefully, for we all like company in our misfortunes, and butcher nodded grimly.

'The young noodle,' he said, emptying his tankard.

Well, after that I kept my ears open, and it was the same story all over the village. There was hardly a young man among all the ghosts of Fairfield who didn't roll home in the small hours of the morning the worse for liquor. I used to wake up in the night and hear them stumble past my house, singing outrageous songs. The

worst of it was that we couldn't keep the scandal to ourselves, and the folk at Greenhill began to talk of 'sodden Fairfield' and taught their children to sing a song about us:

*Sodden Fairfield, sodden Fairfield, has no use for bread-and-butter,  
Rum for breakfast, rum for dinner, rum for tea, and rum for supper!*

We are easy-going in our village, but we didn't like that.

Of course we soon found out where the young fellows went to get the drink, and landlord was terribly cut up that his tenant should have turned out so badly, but his wife wouldn't hear of parting with the brooch, so that he couldn't give the Captain notice to quit. But as time went on, things grew from bad to worse, and at all hours of the day you would see those young reprobates sleeping it off on the village green. Nearly every afternoon a ghost-waggon used to jolt down to the ship with a lading of rum, and though the older ghosts seemed inclined to give the Captain's hospitality the go-by, the youngsters were neither to hold nor to bind.

So one afternoon when I was taking my nap I heard a knock at the door, and there was parson looking very serious, like a man with a job before him that he didn't altogether relish. 'I'm going down to talk to the Captain about all this drunkenness in the village, and I want you to come with me,' he said straight out.

I can't say that I fancied the visit much myself, and I tried to hint to parson that as, after all, they were only a lot of ghosts, it didn't very much matter.

'Dead or alive, I'm responsible for their good conduct,' he said, 'and I'm going to do my duty and put a stop to this continued disorder. And you are coming with me, John Simmons.' So I went, parson being a persuasive kind of man.

We went down to the ship, and as we approached her I could see the Captain tasting the air on deck. When he saw parson he took off his hat very politely, and I can tell you that I was relieved to find that he had a proper respect for the cloth. Parson acknowledged his salute and spoke out stoutly enough. 'Sir, I should be glad to have a word with you.'

'Come on board, sir, come on board,' said the Captain, and I could tell by his voice that he knew why we were there. Parson and I climbed up an uneasy kind of ladder, and the Captain took us into the great cabin at the back of the ship, where the bay-window was. It was the most wonderful place you ever saw in your life, all full of gold and silver plate, swords with jewelled scabbards, carved oak chairs, and great chests that looked as though they were bursting

with guineas. Even parson was surprised, and he did not shake his head very hard when the Captain took down some silver cups and poured us out a drink of rum. I tasted mine, and I don't mind saying that it changed my view of things entirely. There was nothing betwixt and between about that rum, and I felt that it was ridiculous to blame the lads for drinking too much of stuff like that. It seemed to fill my veins with honey and fire.

Parson put the case squarely to the Captain, but I didn't listen much to what he said; I was busy sipping my drink and looking through the window at the fishes swimming to and fro over landlord's turnips. Just then it seemed the most natural thing in the world that they should be there, though afterwards, of course, I could see that that proved it was a ghost-ship.

But even then I thought it was queer when I saw a drowned sailor float by in the thin air with his hair and beard all full of bubbles. It was the first time I had seen anything quite like that at Fairfield.

All the time I was regarding the wonders of the deep, parson was telling Captain Roberts how there was no peace or rest in the village owing to the curse of drunkenness, and what a bad example the youngsters were setting to the older ghosts. The Captain listened very attentively, and only put in a word now and then about boys being boys and young men sowing their wild oats. But when parson had finished his speech he filled up our silver cups and said to parson, with a flourish, 'I should be sorry to cause trouble anywhere where I have been made welcome, and you will be glad to hear that I put to sea to-morrow night. And now you must drink me a prosperous voyage.' So we all stood up and drank the toast with honour, and that noble rum was like hot oil in my veins.

After that Captain showed us some of the curiosities he had brought back from foreign parts, and we were greatly amazed, though afterwards I couldn't clearly remember what they were. And when I found myself walking across the turnips with parson, and I was telling him of the glories of the deep that I had seen through the window of the ship. He turned on me severely. 'If I were you, John Simmons,' he said, 'I should go straight home to bed.' He has a way of putting things that wouldn't occur to an ordinary man, has parson, and I did as he told me.

Well, next day it came on to blow, and it blew harder and harder, till about eight o'clock at night I heard a noise and looked out into the garden. I dare say you won't believe me, it seems a bit tall even to me, but the wind had lifted the thatch of my pigsty into the widow's garden a second time. I thought I wouldn't wait to hear what widow had to say about it, so I went across the green to the

*Fox and Grapes*, and the wind was so strong that I danced along on tip-toe like a girl at the fair. When I got to the inn landlord had to help me shut the door; it seemed as though a dozen goats were pushing against it to come in out of the storm.

'It's a powerful tempest,' he said, drawing the beer. 'I hear there's a chimney down at Dickory End.'

'It's a funny thing how these sailors know about the weather,' I answered. 'When Captain said he was going to-night, I was thinking it would take a capful of wind to carry the ship back to sea, but now here's more than a capful.'

'Ah, yes,' said landlord, 'it's to-night he goes, true enough, and, mind you, though he treated me handsome over the rent, I'm not sure it's a loss to the village. I don't hold with gentrice who fetch their drink from London instead of helping local traders to get their living.'

'But you haven't got any rum like his,' I said to draw him out.

His neck grew red above his collar, and I was afraid I'd gone too far; but after a while he got his breath with a grunt.

'John Simmons,' he said, 'if you've come down here this windy night to talk a lot of fool's talk, you've wasted a journey.'

Well, of course, then I had to smooth him down with praising his rum and Heaven forgive me for swearing it was better than Captain's. For the lik. of that rum no living lips have tasted save mine and parson's. But somehow or other I brought landlord round, and presently we must have a glass of his best to prove its quality.

'Beat that if you can!' he cried, and we both raised our glasses to our mouths, only to stop half-way and look at each other in amaze. For the wind that had been howling outside like an outrageous dog had all of a sudden turned as melodious as the carol-boys of a Christmas Eve.

'Surely that's not my Martha,' whispered landlord; Martha being his great-aunt that lived in the loft overhead.

We went to the door, and the wind burst it open so that the handle was driven clean into the plaster of the wall. But we didn't think about that at the time; for over our heads, sailing very comfortably through the windy stars, was the ship that had passed the summer in landlord's field. Her port-holes and her bay-window were blazing with lights, and there was a noise of singing and fiddling on her decks. 'He's gone,' shouted landlord above the storm, 'and he's taken half the village with him!' I could only nod in answer, not having lungs like bellows of leather.

In the morning we were able to measure the strength of the storm, and over and above my pigsty there was damage enough wrought

in the village to keep us busy. True it is that the children had to break down no branches for the firing that autumn, since the wind had strewn the woods with more than they could carry away. Many of our ghosts were scattered abroad, but this time very few came back, all the young men having sailed with Captain; and not only ghosts, for a poor half-witted lad was missing, and we reckoned that he had stowed himself away or perhaps shipped as cabin-boy, not knowing any better.

What with the lamentations of the ghost-girls and the grumbings of families who had lost an ancestor, the village was upset for a while, and the funny thing was that it was the folk who had complained most of the carryings-on of the youngsters, who made most noise now that they were gone. I hadn't any sympathy with shoemaker or butcher, who ran about saying how much they missed their lads, but it made me grieve to hear the poor bereaved girls calling their lovers by name on the village green at nightfall. It didn't seem fair to me that they should have lost their men a second time, after giving up life in order to join them, as like as not. Still, not even a spirit can be sorry for ever, and after a few months we made up our mind that the folk who had sailed in the ship were never coming back, and we didn't talk about it any more.

And then one day, I dare say it would be a couple of years after, when the whole business was quite forgotten, who should come trapesing along the road from Portsmouth but the daft lad who had gone away with the ship, without waiting till he was dead to become a ghost. You never saw such a boy as that in all your life. He had a great rusty cutlass hanging to a string at his waist, and he was tattooed all over in fine colours, so that even his face looked like a girl's sampler. He had a handkerchief in his hand full of foreign shells and old-fashioned pieces of small money, very curious, and he walked up to the well outside his mother's house and drew himself a drink as if he had been nowhere in particular.

The worst of it was that he had come back as soft-headed as he went, and try as we might we couldn't get anything reasonable out of him. He talked a lot of gibberish about keel-hauling and walking the plank and crimson murders—things which a decent sailor should know nothing about, so that it seemed to me that for all his manners Captain had been more of a pirate than a gentleman mariner. But to draw sense out of that boy was as hard as picking cherries off a crab-tree. One silly tale he had that he kept on drifting back to, and to hear him you would have thought that it was the only thing that happened to him in his life. 'We was at anchor,' he would say, 'off an island called the Basket of Flowers, and the sailors had caught a

lot of parrots and we were teaching them to swear. Up and down the decks, up and down the decks, and the language they used was dreadful. Then we looked up and saw the masts of the Spanish ship outside the harbour. Outside the harbour they were, so we threw the parrots into the sea and sailed out to fight. And all the parrots were drowned in the sea and the language they used was dreadful.' That's the sort of boy he was, nothing but silly talk of parrots when we asked him about the fighting. And we never had a chance of teaching him better, for two days after he ran away again, and hasn't been seen since.

That's my story, and I assure you that things like that are happening at Fairfield all the time. The ship has never come back, but somehow as people grow older they seem to think that one of these windy nights she'll come sailing in over the hedges with all the lost ghosts on board. Well, when she comes, she'll be welcome. There's one ghost-lass that has never grown tired of waiting for her lad to return. Every night you'll see her out on the green, straining her poor eyes with looking for the mast-lights among the stars. A faithful lass you'd call her, and I'm thinking you'd be right.

Landlord's field wasn't a penny the worse for the visit, but they do say that since then the turnips that have been grown in it have tasted of rum.



## A MEMORY

BY JOHN MASEFIELD

IN these first frosty days, now that there is mist at dusk into which the sun's red ball drops, one can gather to the fire as the lamps are lit and take the old book from the shelf, the old tune from the fiddle, and the old memory from its cupboard in the brain. Memory is a thing of rags and patches, an odd heap of gear, a bag of orts. It is a record of follies, a jumble of sketch and etching, heaped anyhow, torn, broken, blurred. One can turn it over, and see now a deck scene, with a watch at the halliards, now a woman weeping, now a carthorse tearing down the road, scattering the crowd. That is the common, haphazard, perishing memory, which is what one has to show for the privilege and glory of being man. But among these shadows, these fugitive pictures, these ghosts, there are persistent memories. Besides those angry and wretched faces, and the flaring lights, and terrible suspenses of the common records, there are others. When those pale faces cease to haunt and the sobs of women leave the heart unwrung for a little, then the grander memory comes flooding in, august, symbolic, like the rising of the full moon; like the coming of the tide out of the hollows of the sea. A scene, an event, some little thing, will take to itself a significant beauty. What did this mean, or this, or this? Was it that common thing, was it what we thought? It was a King passing, it was Life going by, it was life laid bare, the tick of the red heart, the face under the veil, the tune's meaning. We thought that it was this, or this: the woman's hand putting back her hair, the haze lifting from the sea. It was a revelation: it was a miracle; it was a sweeping back of Death to his place in chaos.

Now that these frosty days are on us, and the fires are lit, the memory wakens, and quickens. Those recurrent images, having the strength of symbols, rise up within me, suggesting their concealed truth. That single memory, which has haunted me so long, persists. It comes to me day after day, charged with meaning, beautiful and solemn, hinting at secrets. The thing was so beautiful, it could not be a chance, a mere event, finite, a thing of a day. Like all beautiful things, it is a symbol of all beauty, a hand flinging back the window,



the touch bringing the grass blade from the seed, the fire destroying Troy. All lovely things have that symbolic power, that key of release. One has but to fill the mind, and to meditate upon a lovely thing, to pass out of this world, where the best is but a shadow, to that other world, the world of beauty, 'where the golden blossoms burn upon the trees for ever.'

I was at sea in a sailing ship, walking up and down the lee side of the poop, keeping the time, and striking the bell at each half hour. It was early in the morning watch, a little after four in the morning. We were in the tropics, not very far from the Doldrums, in the last of the Trades. We were sailing slowly, making perhaps some three or four knots an hour under all sail. The dawn was in the sky to leeward of us, full of wonderful colour, full of embers and fire, changing the heaven, smouldering and burning, breaking out into bloody patches, fading into faint gold, into grey, into a darkness like smoke. There was a haze on the sea, very white and light, moving and settling. Dew was dripping from the sails, from the ropes, from the eaves of the charthouse. The decks shone with dew. In the half-light of the dusk, the binnacle lamps burnt pale and strangely. There was a red patch forward, in the water and on the mist, where the sidelight burned. The men were moving to and fro on the deck below me, walking slowly in couples, one of them singing softly, others quietly talking. They had not settled down to sleep since the muster, because they were expecting the morning 'coffee', then brewing in the galley. The galley funnel sent trails of sparks over to leeward, and now and then the cook passed to the ship's side to empty ashes into the sea. It was a scene common enough. The same pageant was played before me every other day, whenever I had the morning watch. There was the sunrise and the dewy decks, the sails dripping, and the men shuffling about along the deck. But on this particular day the common scenes and events were charged with meaning as though they were the initiation to a mystery, the music playing before a pageant. It may have been the mist, which made everything unreal and uncertain, especially in the twilight, with the strange glow coming through it from the dawn. I remember that a block made a soft melancholy noise in the mizzen rigging as though a bird had awakened upon a branch, and the noise, though common enough, made everything beautiful, just as a little touch of colour will set off a sombre picture and give a value to each tint. Then the ball of the sun came out of the sea in a mass of blood and fire, spreading streamers of gold and rose along the edges of the clouds to the mid-heaven. As he climbed from the water, and the last stars paled, the haze lifted and died. Its last shadows moved away from the sea like

grey deer going to new pasture, and as they went, the look-out gave a hail of a ship being to windward of us.

When I saw her first there was a smoke of mist about her as high as her foreyard. Her topsails and flying kites had a faint glow upon them where the dawn caught them. Then the mist rolled away from her, so that we could see her hull and the glimmer of the red sidelight as it was hoisted inboard. She was rolling slightly, tracing an arc against the heaven, and as I watched her the glow upon her deepened, till every sail she wore burned rosily like an opal turned to the sun, like a fiery jewel. She was radiant, she was of an immortal beauty, that swaying, delicate clipper. Coming as she came, out of the mist into the dawn, she was like a spirit, like an intellectual presence. Her hull glowed, her rails glowed; there was colour upon the boats and tackling. She was a lofty ship (with skysails and royal staysails), and it was wonderful to watch her, blushing in the sun, swaying and curveting. She was alive with a more than mortal life. One thought that she would speak in some strange language or break out into a music which would express the sea and that great flower in the sky. She came trembling down to us, rising up high and plunging; showing the red lead below her water-line; then diving down till the smother bubbled over her hawseholes. She bowed and curveted; the light caught the skylights on the poop; she gleamed and sparkled; she shook the sea from her as she rose. There was no man aboard of us but was filled with the beauty of that ship. I think they would have cheered her had she been a little nearer to us; as it was, we ran up our flags in answer to her, adding our position and comparing our chronometers, then dipping our ensigns and standing away. For some minutes I watched her, as I made up the flags before putting them back in their cupboard. The old mate limped up to me, and spat and swore. 'That's one of the beautiful sights of the world,' he said. 'That, and a cornfield, and a woman with her child. It's beauty and strength. How would you like to have one of them skysails round your neck?' I gave him some answer and continued to watch her, till the beautiful, precise hull, with all its lovely detail, had become blurred to leeward, where the sun was now marching in triumph, the helm of a golden warrior plumed in cirrus.



## AFTER THE STORM

BY ERNEST HEMINGWAY

IT wasn't about anything, something about making punch, and then we started fighting and I slipped and he had me down kneeling on my chest and choking me with both hands like he was trying to kill me and all the time I was trying to get the knife out of my pocket to cut him loose. Everybody was too drunk to pull him off me. He was choking me and hammering my head on the floor and I got the knife out and opened it up; and I cut the muscle right across his arm and he let go of me. He couldn't have held on if he wanted to. Then he rolled and hung on to that arm and started to cry and I said:

'What the hell you want to choke me for?'

I'd have killed him. I couldn't swallow for a week. He hurt my throat bad.

Well, I went out of there and there were plenty of them with him and some came out after me and I made a turn and was down by the docks and I met a fellow and he said somebody killed a man up the street. I said, 'Who killed him?' and he said, 'I don't know who killed him but he's dead all right', and it was dark and there was water standing in the street and no lights and windows broke and boats all up in the town and trees blown down and everything all blown and I got a skiff and went out and found my boat where I had her inside of Mango Key and she was all right only she was full of water. So I bailed her out and pumped her out and there was a moon but plenty of clouds and still plenty rough and I took it down along; and when it was daylight I was off Eastern Harbour.

Brother, that was some storm. I was the first boat out and you never saw water like that was. It was just as white as a lye barrel and coming from Eastern Harbour to Sou'west Key you couldn't recognise the shore. There was a big channel blown right out through the middle of the beach. Trees and all blown out and a channel cut through and all the water white as chalk and everything on it; branches and whole trees and dead birds, and all floating. Inside the keys were all the pelicans in the world and all kinds of birds flying. They must have gone inside there when they knew it was coming.

I lay at Sou'west Key a day and nobody came after me. I was the first boat out and I seen a spar floating and I knew there must be a wreck and I started out to look for her. I found her. She was a three-masted schooner and I could just see the stumps of her spars out of water. She was in too deep water and I didn't get anything off of her. So I went on looking for something else. I had the start on all of them and I knew I ought to get whatever there was. I went down over the sand-bar from where I left that three-masted schooner and I didn't find anything and I went on a long way. I was way out toward the quicksands and I didn't find anything so I went on. Then when I was in sight of the Rebecca Light I saw all kinds of birds making over something and I headed over for them to see what it was and there was a cloud of birds all right.

I could see something looked like a spar up out of the water and when I got over close the birds all went up in the air and stayed all around me. The water was clear out there and there was a spar of some kind sticking out just above the water and when I come up close to it I saw it was all dark under water like a long shadow and I came right over it and there under the water was a liner; just lying there all under water as big as the whole world. I drifted over her in the boat. She lay on her side and the stern was deep down. The port holes were all shut tight and I could see the glass shine in the water and the whole of her; the biggest boat I ever saw in my life laying there and I went along the whole length of her and then I went over and anchored and I had the skiff on the deck forward and I shoved it down into the water and sculled over with the birds all around me.

I had a water glass like we use sponging and my hand shook so I could hardly hold it. All the port holes were shut that you could see going along over her but way down below near the bottom something must have been open because there were pieces of things floating out all the time. You couldn't tell that they were. Just pieces. That's what the birds were after. You never saw so many birds. They were all around me; crazy yelling.

I could see everything sharp and clear. I could see her rounded over and she looked a mile long under the water. She was lying on a clear white bank of sand and the spar was a sort of foremast or some sort of tackle that slanted out of water the way she was laying on her side. Her bow wasn't very far under. I could stand on the letters of her name on her bow and my head was just out of water. But the nearest port hole was twelve feet down. I could just reach it with the grains pole and I tried to break it with that but I couldn't. The glass was too stout. So I sculled back to the boat and got a

wrench and lashed it to the end of the grains pole and I couldn't break it. There I was looking down through the glass at that liner with everything in her and I was the first one to her and I couldn't get into her. She must have had five million dollars' worth in her.

It made me shaky to think how much she must have in her. Inside the port hole that was closed I could see something but I couldn't make it out through the water glass. I couldn't do any good with the grains pole and I took off my clothes and stood and took a couple of deep breaths and dove over off the stern with the wrench in my hand and swam down. I could hold on for a second to the edge of the port hole, and I could see in and there was a woman inside with her hair floating all out. I could see her floating plain and I hit the glass twice with the wrench hard and I heard the noise clink in my ears but it wouldn't break and I had to come up.

I hung on to the dinghy and got my breath and then I climbed in and took a couple of breaths and dove again. I swam down and took hold of the port hole with my fingers and held it and hit the glass as hard as I could with the wrench. I could see the woman floated in the water through the glass. Her hair was tied once close to her head and it floated all out in the water. I could see the rings on one of her hands. She was right up close to the port hole and I hit the glass twice and I didn't even crack it. When I came up I thought I wouldn't make it to the top before I'd have to breathe.

I went down once more and I cracked the glass, only cracked it, and when I came up my nose was bleeding and I stood on the bow of the liner with my bare feet on the letters of her name and my head just out and rested there and then I swam over to the skiff and pulled up into it and sat there waiting for my head to stop aching and looking down into the water glass, but I bled so I had to wash out the water glass. Then I lay back in the skiff and held my hand under my nose to stop it and I lay there with my head back looking up and there was a million birds above and all around.

When I quit bleeding I took another look through the glass and then I sculled over to the boat to try and find something heavier than the wrench but I couldn't find a thing; not even a sponge hook. I went back and the water was clearer all the time and you could see everything that floated out over that white bank of sand. I looked for sharks but there weren't any. You could have seen a shark a long way away. The water was so clear and the sand white. There was a grapple for an anchor on the skiff and I cut it off and went overboard and down with it. It carried me right down and past the port hole and I grabbed and couldn't hold anything and went on down and down, sliding along the curved side of her. I had to let go of the

grapple. I heard it bump once and it seemed like a year before I came up through to the top of the water. The skiff was floated away with the tide and I swam over to her with my nose bleeding in the water while I swam and I was plenty glad there weren't sharks; but I was tired.

My head felt cracked open and I lay in the skiff and rested and then I sculled back. It was getting along in the afternoon. I went down once more with the wrench and it didn't do any good. That wrench was too light. It wasn't any good diving unless you had a big hammer or something heavy enough to do good. Then I lashed the wrench to the grains pole again and I watched through the water glass and pounded on the glass and hammered until the wrench came off and I saw it in the glass, clear and sharp, go sliding down along her and then off and down to the quicksand and go in. Then I couldn't do a thing. The wrench was gone and I'd lost the grapple so I sculled back to the boat. I was too tired to get the skiff aboard and the sun was pretty low. The birds were all pulling out and leaving her and I headed for Sou'west Key towing the skiff and the birds going on ahead of me and behind me. I was plenty tired.

That night it came on to blow and it blew for a week. You couldn't get out to her. They came out from town and told me the fellow I'd had to cut was all right except for his arm and I went back to town and they put me under a five hundred dollar bond. It came out all right because some of them, friends of mine, swore he was after me with an axe; but by the time we got back out to her the Greeks had blown her open and cleaned her out. They got the safe out with dynamite. Nobody ever knows how much they got. She carried gold and they got it all. They stripped her clean. I found her and I never got a nickel out of her.

It was a hell of a thing all right. They say she was just outside of Havana harbour when the hurricane hit and she couldn't get in or the owners wouldn't let the captain chance coming in; they say he wanted to try; so she had to go with it and in the dark they were running with it trying to go through the gulf between Rebecca and Tortugas when she struck on the quicksands. Maybe her rudder was carried away. Maybe they weren't even steering. But anyway they couldn't have known they were quicksands and when she struck the captain must have ordered them to open up the ballast tanks so she'd lay solid. But it was quicksand she'd hit and when they opened the tank she went in stern first and then over on her beam ends. There were four hundred and fifty passengers and the crew on board of her and they must all have been aboard of her when I found her. They must have opened the tanks as soon as she struck and the minute she settled

on it the quicksands took her down. Then her boilers must have burst and that must have been what made those pieces that came out. It was funny there weren't any sharks though. There wasn't a fish. I could have seen them on that clear white sand.

Plenty of fish now though; jewfish, the biggest kind. The biggest part of her's under the sand now but they live inside of her; the biggest kind of jewfish. Some weigh three to four hundred pounds. Sometime we'll go out and get some. You can see the Rebecca light from where she is. They've got a buoy on her now. She's right at the end of the quicksand right at the end of the gulf. She only missed going through by about a hundred yards. In the dark in the storm they just missed it; raining the way it was they couldn't have seen the Rebecca. Then they're not used to that sort of thing. The captain of a liner isn't used to scudding that way. They have a course and they tell me they set some sort of a compass and it steers itself. They probably didn't know where they were when they ran with that blow but they come close to making it. Maybe they'd lost the rudder though. Anyway there wasn't another thing for them to hit till they'd got to Mexico once they were in that gulf. Must have been something though when they struck in that rain and wind and he told them to open her tanks. Nobody could have been on deck in that blow and rain. Everybody must have been below. They couldn't have lived on deck. There must have been some scenes inside all right because you know she settled fast. I saw that wrench go into the sand. The captain couldn't have known it was quicksand when she struck unless he knew these waters. He just knew it wasn't rock. He must have seen it all up in the bridge. He must have known what it was about when she settled. I wonder how fast she made it. I wonder if the mate was there with him. Do you think they stayed inside the bridge or do you think they took it outside? They never found any bodies. Not a one. Nobody floating. They float a long way with lifebelts too. They must have took it inside. Well, the Greeks got it all. Everything. They must have come fast all right. They picked her clean. First there was the birds, then me, then the Greeks, and even the birds got more out of her than I did.







# THE ROAD TO THE SHORE

BY A. A. BELDON

## I

IT was a favourite walk of mine, when the days were fine enough and the wind not too cutting, along the stone groyne that projected like some old abandoned undertaking from out of the soft sand and coarse grass of the foreshore. I suppose that at one time, before the great granite piers were built, it had marked the real end to the river; but its usefulness seemed to have long since been given over to the small boys who fished with high optimism from the stones, or performed acrobatics over the massive rusted railings.

There were a few wooden seats, too—you know the kind, devoid of paint and all hacked with the sprawling initials of successive generations of youth—clustered round the base of a stumpy tower that had once been white. I used to like to sit there and watch the traffic moving up and down the smoky river; a river which would have been depressing but for the bright colourings of the steamers' flags and funnels splashed across the background of innumerable dwellings that huddled and clung with the tenacity of mussels to the rising banks.

That particular afternoon I sat down on a seat occupied by two men—the other seats were taken up by either urchins or the smelly remnants of marine creatures that small boys delight to impale on fish-hooks—and began to fill the pipe I always enjoyed there in the salt-tanged air. I took no particular notice of these men, who seemed, judging from the lack of conversation, to be strangers to each other. Anyway I was rather interested in a steamer with sides well streaked with rust, which at that moment was passing a line over her stern to a dirty but efficient tugboat that poked its nose right under the counter. I can remember the young officer hanging over the rails right aft, signing with one hand to the sailors handling the heavy rope; the pilot running to the side of the bridge blowing a little shrill whistle, and the sudden white flurry of steam like a big piece of cotton-wool that had somehow attached itself to the buff-coloured funnel of the tug. Then came the sound, a single short

blast, full of vigour and eagerness, and the cotton-wool was gone. Dense black smoke rose up, vertically and sudden, from the tug's stack, and in such volume that one wondered how so small a craft could manufacture the stuff so prodigiously: then ship and escort passed on, lost among the dim shapes of other hulls showing through the murk.

The children left the benches, noisily, and ran bare-footed over the flat stones towards the shore and the sand, their voices growing fainter as their darting figures diminished. I noticed, then, that one of the men—the one farthest from me—had stood up. He was short in stature, past middle age, but very respectably dressed; I saw that his clothes were good but far from new, the black overcoat a little shining at the shoulders; the bowler hat had lost the intensity of its black; the lower parts of his trousers were just a little frayed. A man, I thought, who had to be careful.

He did not immediately walk away, but with his back to me and the ferrule of his stick scratching on the stones, seemed to pause in deep and serious thought; then turning slowly he looked right over my head towards the east and the sea. It was then that I beheld his face for the first—and last—time. There was nothing conspicuous about it; no single feature that commanded attention; nothing out of place; just a pleasant, well-balanced countenance, ruddy, with the flush of health.

He turned away a little. His eyes, blue and frank, seemed to fasten on distant objects, as though searching sadly for some sign he alone expected. And then he spoke, as if to himself, in a voice that had the slight huskiness of a strong voice that is subdued.

'No. I will go now,' he said; 'I don't think I could bear to see her again. Let me know how you get on.' The stick swept up in a gesture of farewell and he started off over the bleached and sea-worn stones towards the shore, erect and unhurried, looking to neither right nor left.

'Good-bye, sir,' the sharer of my seat answered, with an elevation of the hand that seemed like a compromise between a salute and a mere wave, 'I will let you know.'

Now, I must confess to a normal amount of interest in my fellows, apart from the insatiable and morbid curiosity that seems to infect a quarter of the human race. Speculating on a man's occupation by a glance at his hands and face, or on the county that claims him by the dialect he utters, is a pastime that has its own charms—and often surprising results.

An idle pastime you may say; but as conversation often follows, I have indeed learned much from my idleness. I was surprised when

the men spoke, thinking they had no knowledge of each other. The odd sentence or two sounded uncommonly like an allusion to some sordid family upheaval. I would have lost all further interest had not the young man bid me good afternoon as he rolled, with able fingers, a cigarette from coarse tobacco intended, I am sure, for a pipe. He might have been thirty, with a brown face and a strong jaw line; a straight nose and eyes that were dark and wonderfully alert, with little crows' feet at the corners. Like his older companion now half-way to the shore he wore clothes of a dark material. The interest, however, lay not in his clothes, but in his face, his strong voice, and brown hands that seemed to belong to an older man.

There was something these men had in common which I could not place; they bore a common stamp. The respect of the younger man for the elder (so often forgotten these days) discounted any relationship. Their voices, free of any trace of dialect, were of no assistance.

I returned the young man's greeting. 'Favourite walk of mine, this,' I added; 'interesting here. I like to watch the traffic on the river, to read the names of the steamers and wonder where they come from—and where they are bound. That one now, that's just come in . . .'

'One of Baines' tramps,' he replied; 'saw her coming into Aden one morning with her plates red-hot and the foremast hanging over her bows like a broken bowsprit; couldn't see much for steam. She glowed like a brazier at night—until they scuttled her. Cotton, you know.'

He crossed his legs and blew a lot of strong smoke down his nostrils.

'Cotton, you say?' I was woefully ignorant. But the light dawned on his occupation.

'Yes. Queer stuff to stow. New paint in the hold is taboo, and oil! Especially oil. Got to check the oilcans up every now and then; those coolies oil the screws far too often if they are not watched. Spontaneous combustion, you know.'

'Really?' I answered, I hope, with a reasonable degree of intelligence.

'I suppose,' he went on, 'that the "old man" would be on the carpet for that. I can imagine the explanatory report to the owners, and the nice cutting letter in reply—you know the sort of thing—beginning, "Dear Captain. We fail to understand;" or, "We shudder to think," and so on. They always fail to understand.'

He stretched out a hand in a gesture of hopelessness.

'Yes,' he went on, without waiting for any comment from me, 'they always fail to understand. I would be mad to assume they were capable of any understanding in these things. How can they? They get up at eight, arrive at the office between nine and ten all rigged out in black and white complete with umbrella; read *The Times* and the mail, have coffee at eleven, chat with the typist, and pack up for lunch at one; tot up a few figures in the afternoon, dictate a few letters about four, then go home, exhausted, to a loving wife and family. I ask you, sir,' he said, looking at me with an eye of appealing and good-natured frankness, 'how can they understand?'

I said I really did not know, watching him inhale deeply of a smoke that would upset many a stomach. It seemed to inspire him to further efforts of loquacity, to deeper and less tolerant thought. A sea-bird, with a raucous scream passed very low, heading towards the sea, a study in white curves against the sombre black-grey dwellings of men on the far side of the river.

'No,' my companion began again, 'they will never understand. We don't expect them to; it is too much. I suppose when that Captain explained everything at the office, they would offer a lot of impracticable and idiotic suggestions on how to prevent cotton cargoes from taking fire in the Indian Ocean, ending with, "now Captain, if only you had done such and such, just consider, all this would never have happened; our steamer would not have lost twelve months freighting, apart from repairs, &c., and you could still have continued in our employ." Then they would send him home, for ever and ever, Amen.'

I murmured some sounds which I thought suitable. Politely I asked, 'Do you really mean to say. . . ?'

He cut me off. 'I am saying it. These things happen. I follow a calling, sir, where all accidents are apparently someone's mistakes and retribution follows with unemotional alacrity.'

'Do you not then become—a little embittered?' I ventured. To my surprise he smiled, and his teeth looked strong and white against the ruddy weathered face.

'You can't become embittered against the sea or the ship, or the misfortunes that fall into the definition of "Acts of God." And as for the owners—why, have I not said what they always themselves admit—that they fail to understand?'

There was a silence after that, broken only by the ripple of water surging round the stones below and the impatient blasts of a siren somewhere up the smoky reaches of the river. I observed the keen eyes of my companion sweeping in a slow arc along the great stretch of the northern breakwater; but I think he was looking beyond

even that. He seemed, like the other man, to gaze on far-off things. Quite suddenly, without shortening his vision, he remarked—

‘I suppose that I, too, will come to it some day. *His* came late, and a man’s chances at sixty are slender.’ His head indicated by a slight sideways inclination the way to the shore.

‘Your friend who sat here?’

‘My friend? A former Captain of mine. I never quite looked upon him as a friend when I was with him out there. Don’t misunderstand me, the word “friend” is not normally used in the relationship between the Master and second mate of a merchant steamer—and I was the second mate. There were two other officers, of course, and the engineers; an Indian crew from the Ratnagari district, Christian boys from the Goa coast and a Chinese carpenter. Quite a mixture of races and creeds like a League of Nations in embryo. But unlike that collection of vociferous citizens, dealers in high-level discord, we were a contented lot; free of even the petty upsets that can make life a trial in the cramped space available in a medium-sized steamer.

‘There, you come to know a man as in no other calling; his virtues and his faults stand out clear and naked like the peaks and valleys of a mountain range that show black and sharp against a setting sun. Because there are no outside distractions you seek the company of your fellows with a spirit unknown between companions ashore, and with an understanding not of the surface, but which goes deep down into the heart of things. Because a man appears each day in a white shirt, trousers, and topce it is natural to associate him only with such rig. You never know his worldly possessions because, like the reverse face of the moon, they are invisible; but unlike the moon they excite no interest and are not even thought of. No, you come to know only him. You peep down into his soul.

‘In his case it was different—he was the Master, above all three of us officers in rank, in experience, and in technical skill. I know that he held the rare and esteemed certificate of Extra Master, Square Rigged. The very fact that he had suffered the head-winds and the cold fury of the Horn, had fought the frozen canvas on a royal yard swinging dizzily through the black night of the Southern Ocean, and lain waiting for wind in the burning calms of the Gulf of Siam, made us regard him with a deep professional reverence. When on the odd occasions at the cabin table he made reference to some episode in big square riggers before he took to steam, we felt humbled. Not uncomfortably so. Perhaps that is a point that only a seaman can appreciate. One thought, here is a man who is allowed, by a very critical Board of Trade, to command not only the largest

steamship afloat, but also the largest sailing vessel; further, there is no higher acknowledgment of his art and skill but what he possesses. Our pride in technical matters was humbled. All the things we knew he also knew; beyond that there was a great field of experience, of knowledge and of achievement which was his alone. Had he not brought his ship, dismasted and battered, safely in under jury-rig after the whirling hell of a Bengal cyclone?

'And yet he never tried to make you humble. He did not delight, as some I have known, in alluding to you as "you steamboat-man" in that derisive manner that only makes you grind your teeth. No. He was quiet and alert, a little shy even, one might have said. And methodical to a fault; decisive too. Beside him, one derived that feeling of confidence that radiates only from the chosen few. Standing together on the blacked-out bridge searching for some unlighted island that was always something of a nightmare to pass in the dark, he would replace the night-glasses and say, "There we are now, keep her off half a point," or something like that, and your tension eased. You relaxed because your faith in him was strong. There was never any "You don't think you've passed it yet, Mister?" No, he was comfortably decisive.

'And yet, somehow, there was a great barrier behind which he sheltered. It seemed impossible to get close to the man, to know him, to understand him with the same vision as you understand the other officers, for instance. I realised after a while that he told you absolutely nothing of himself, that his conversations were limited to purely technical matters.

'He and I would take observations together by unusual methods. He knew all the methods I proposed—and others I had never heard of. We discussed the value of these things, and just when I thought, when I felt, that he was about to say something of himself, he would leave the bridge abruptly and take to walking his own deck quite quickly for perhaps a couple of hours without pause.

'We admired him, for his skill, for the confidence he dispersed. We liked his quiet manner, his fair judgment, his unobtrusive way of life. I think he was perhaps the nearest approach to a perfect shipmaster I shall ever meet. But he was not spoken of with any great depth of affection. In the club out there, when his name came up (as they always do), officers who knew him all gave the same answer, "Smart, isn't he? But deep, don't you think?"

'No. I don't think he was deep—not in that way. I think he was shy and therefore lonely. And I never heard him swear. That alone is unusual; more, it is remarkable in a profession where the use of descriptive words and colourful phrases is accepted, not as bad

language, but as part of a necessary vocabulary. The heat alone is, at times out there, enough to warrant a special dictionary of its own.

'We traded to and fro, among the ports and harbours of the East. East of Suez—west of Guam. But our home port, as we liked to call it rather fondly, was up a great muddy river that lay sprawled like an immense brown and leafless tree that had fallen across a desert of yellow sand, with the roots growing out of the sea. On either bank the narrow, continuous belt of palms, dark green and close-packed, was the only relief in a flat and dreary immensity of sand, and always reminded me of green moss clinging for life to the body of the tree. Which was what the trees were doing. Nearest the water they were tall and splendid, but tapered to poor stunted things towards the desert. The river meant life: to the trees; to the dark-skinned people walking erect along the endless mud walls; to the jackals that howled in wailing packs at night; to the millions of croaking bull-frogs that put up a continuous vibrating screen of noise on which all the other sounds of the night were projected.

'But in daylight the river belonged to man—as much as this one before us. Ships came and went. Anchors splashed through the muddy waters with the cables rumbling noisily through the hawse-pipes, flinging the mud of far-off places in parabolic showers over the bows. Tugboats churned the turbid and sickly smelling stream; native sailing craft, silent and with an air of deep and ancient mystery, glided without noise over the unchanging river. Yes, by day it was industrious, prosperous, civilised. But when the sun set, the night rushed over from the east like a hurrying shadow, filling the world with stars and the screaming voices of nature, of innumerable wild and unseen things that vied with each other for acoustic supremacy across the dark water between the darker forests.

'And with a majestic disregard the great river flowed on. It must have been doing that for a million years; flowing on—and carrying the mud to the sea. The sea won—it always does in the end—and the mud is dropping now even as I talk, building up the banks and shoals that stretch, unseen and treacherous, in long irregular patches that are as unstable and varying as the sea itself is unalterable.

'Navigation and pilotage were difficult tasks among the tortuous channels and strong streams that were, at times, so unreliable. So we had many pilots and they were stationed in a large pilot-boat that lay at anchor just to seaward of the shoals. It was a good pilot-boat—once: as big as that tug over there.'

My young companion, by a nod of his head, brought me back to a grey English river where a large and dirty tug was making fast



to a buoy. He paused only to relight the cigarette which for want of smoking had died out between his fingers. I was glad when he began again.

'Much cleaner, of course. Everything scrubbed, polished, and painted; just as it should be, and is out there in ships with big native crews. The brasswork shone like the proverbial dollar in the nigger's hand. Her pole masts were scraped and varnished; her awnings flat and without a wrinkle; her cable, as she swung at anchor, was whitewashed man-o'-war fashion. And her boats! Immaculate is the only word. She always looked like that, as if the paint had not quite dried.

'You may wonder why I, a seaman, should enlarge upon the virtues of a craft that I had not even set foot aboard. It is unnatural, not in keeping with the spirit of loyalty that grows upon a man sailing in even the crankiest tub that ever floated. Yet I must tell the facts as they were—she was a joy to behold as she lay like a faultless model upon a smiling sea. Every single ship that arrived and departed knew her. Every man admired her in silence: we do not often give tongue to such admiration in other ships, for we are a highly critical breed. But she was different. She had a profound influence, especially on the mate of every ship, injecting into him a restive discontent with his own past efforts. I don't think that the crew of a homeward-bounder realised what lay behind the suddenly acquired meticulousness that animated its chief officer. No ordinary clean-up and paint would do; the greatest efforts would not satisfy; the striving after such perfection would be a gallant but impossible task. And the mate of that pilot-boat, sipping his gin under the double awnings, was supremely unaware of the amount of human endeavour he stirred up.

'We saw quite a lot of her. Every few weeks we would return to find her resplendent and motionless at her anchorage, performing in silence her indispensable service. Sometimes, in the shimmering heat, when the surface of the sea was like unpolished pewter, when the horizon was lost completely and one had the impression of steaming through the sky itself, she would loom up, far away, resembling a string of barges piled high with celestial cargoes drifting deserted through space. It took two or three hours' steaming to weld the distorted images into the familiar shape we knew so well, into the thing we grew to look upon as a permanent mark among the treacherous shoals.

'And yet, with all her goodness, I came to hate her.

'It was a morning in early summer when we left the jetty up that river and dropped down the muddy steam with the great palms like

a thick living fence on either bank. I remember the tug, disappearing round the bends ahead of us like a gaudy and immense water-beetle that refused to allow us to come nearer. Her bow waves, breaking on the low banks, washed the very roots of the trees and violently agitated the odd native boats moored here and there to the shore, causing the burnous-clad boatmen to shake their fists and call Allah to witness their righteousness.

'The heat, as usual, was dry and intense, though the hour was yet early. The air over the trees rose up like the air above a brazier; the desert beyond was a yellow blur, like a picture out of focus. But we get used to these things, and discomfort is a comparative term. We looked forward to the wet cold monsoon, but having encountered it preferred again the dry heat. But early summer is not too bad out there and that morning was as pleasant as most. We were glad to be off again; change and motion are good things. We would soon be at our old routine, our regular duties; our gin and quiet yarning in the hot evenings. And he—he would be back to his solitary meditation as he walked alone up and down his deck, thinking of God knows what. You see, he stood outside even when duty was over.

'The Goanese boy called me with the inevitable tea and toast at seven-thirty; I had turned in for a couple of hours while coming down the river, having been up all night. I could see, from my bunk, the shades of brown and blue of the shoals. The palms had disappeared: we had left the river behind. A floating buoy with red topmark went past the open ports of my room, the eddies rotating the thing like a spinning top. I knew then that we were in the dredged channel cut through the mud-banks to the sea. Another half-hour and we would be dropping the pilot.

'I drank my tepid tea at a single gulp—amazing what a paltry thing a cupful of tea is in that dehydrating heat—smoked, and dressed leisurely. Everything in that ship seemed to flow smoothly. No upsets. No shouting or bad temper; nothing to ruffle the placidity of our existence. I heard the native pilot coming from the bridge to get his bag. His duties up there were finished and the Master was taking her over towards the pilot-vessel to drop him. I could hear the mate, who had just come below, humming in the jerking fashion that accompanies the flourishing of a shaving-brush. He used to hum that same tune every morning at the same time, and I connect it now with the smell of a famous brand of shaving-soap. But I was just as much a creature of habit. I picked up my topee, an <sup>1</sup>, walking up the alleyway to his room, stood leaning in at his door for a few minutes' chat before going to the bridge for that most important of tasks—the pre-breakfast winding of the chronometers.

'A sudden, shattering rattle of the telegraph chains in the casing above my head, brought us both in an infinitesimal period of time to the alert. I remember the bell in the engine-room sounding clear and urgent above the hum of the turbines; the look of questioning alarm and tenseness in the eyes of the mate as he swung away from the mirror, razor in hand; the sudden rush of feet on the bridge above us; confused warning shouts; but above all I remember the picture that I saw as I jerked my head up to look out of the forward port of the mate's room. On either side of the sunlit expanse of awning over our forecastle-head the flashing varnished masts of the pilot-vessel rose up, and in between them the big new-looking funnel protruded as if growing out of our stempost. I never realised, till then, how large that pilot-vessel was.

'And I never quite remember negotiating the intricacies of the narrow alleys or leaping over the eighteen-inch weather-boards in that sudden burst of energy that precipitated us both on to our own forecastle-head. The last of our Indian seamen was struggling with his sleeping-mat as if it were the most treasured relic that ever came out of Mecca. Perhaps for him it was. I felt the characteristic trembling of the deck that develops in a deep-laden ship when the engines are going full astern. Why the mate and I had raced forward I do not know. There was nothing we could do, now that our fore-end was cleared of men. Perhaps it was mere instinct to face up to a danger in the open.

'Then came the crunch. That, I think, is the only word. We struck her a little forward of amidships on her starboard side, and she, poor thing, was tied down by her own anchor and cable like a tethered goat feeling the impact of a jungle tiger; only our speed was slow—not above three or four knots. But fourteen thousand tons need some stopping even at that. With her cable under us keeping her jammed hard up against our port side, she slid and crunched and tore as she slipped aft. The mate and I stood still, appalled and helpless in the brilliant hot sunshine, listening to the sickening sounds and watching the slow disintegration of that craft before our eyes.

'Two or three of our awning spars, ripping the canvas, beat down on her light bridge like white flaying and chastising arms: there was a rending of wood and iron, the stanchions of her light superstructure were torn away, and the upper deck partially collapsed. I could see, as she came aft, that the heavy square timber running round her hull was shorn through and that the shell-plating showed a vertical gash. Her big grey motor-launch still immaculate, still hanging at the davits ready for service, seemed to float along our

rail—until it came up against our midship house; it went to pieces in three seconds, the planking sprung up and showered everywhere, settling in a confused mass on our foredeck over the smashed engine. The big massive davits themselves seemed suddenly changed to warm wax; they bent and twisted so easily. And so it went on, down the full length of our port side, until finally she slid clear and the awful tearing, shearing, and groaning ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

I looked at the mate. His face, half-covered still with drying soap-lather, looked blank; not surprised, not afraid, just blank. Perhaps I looked the same. I felt a little numbed. Something had happened that was quite new to me; something unpleasant; our way of life was upset. I wanted that boat to be whole again; back on her station intact and perfect.

"Stand by to let go. Port anchor, Mister." I looked up to the bridge. It was the Master speaking and his voice was unchanged. The mate, safety razor still in hand, called out "Chippy, Chippy" to the Chinese carpenter, who, looking like an emaciated convalescent ignoring medical advice, was leaping up the iron ladder with his hammer for the windlass.

I went quickly to the bridge and stood near the Master, admiring the cool precise manner he delivered his orders and got the ship brought up, thinking also that I seemed to be the only one affected by the recent accident. Nothing at that moment seemed very much altered; just a few broken awning spars and a heap of rubbish on our foredeck. The sea was unchanged; the sun penetrated the awning above our heads with its usual intensity. The matter of chronometer-winding seemed all-important. As for the vessel we had struck, she was now presenting her best side, and beyond having a slight list did not appear very much different.

I was just finishing an entry in the chronometer journal when he entered the chartroom, sitting down on the settee with a little sigh like that of a man fatigued after a great exertion. It was a difficult moment; what could I say? To say nothing at all could be interpreted as a silent and unmanly accusation of guilt. To say, "Bad show, sir," would of course have been worse, and the words, "I'm sorry, sir," would have been a milk-and-water sort of remark when the issue was so deep.

I felt that I wanted to sympathise, but didn't know how to start. I felt, too, at that moment, that it was the human and not the material issue which monopolised my thoughts. I was glad when he spoke.

"That's the end for me, second mate," he said. And his voice was

tragically soft and sad, like a man who speaks of the passing of an affectionate friend.

"I turned then. He looked old and weary, but not ashamed. When his eyes met mine they were disturbingly searching for some answer that eluded him. Perhaps for my judgment. As if that mattered! As if that could possibly alter the future for him. Perhaps for a sign of loss of faith in him, I don't know. But I knew that, for the time being, the barrier was down.

"Not for you, sir!" I replied. "I wouldn't look at it quite like that, especially at your age." A great sympathy and a great loyalty was suddenly born within me. "Why the devil didn't she heave short? We might have missed her!"

"He put aside my suggestion of blame, wagging his head from side to side in the slow way of a man who does not understand and who is not satisfied. I observed the puzzled expression of his eyes.

"She wouldn't sheer when I went astern," he said in a flat voice. "And she held on even with the helm hard over and a kick ahead." He looked old, defeated and puzzled. Some spark seemed to have died out. "No," he said after a little pause, "she tricked me. It is the end. There is no excuse."

"He got up slowly, without the customary vigour that had always been his, and went below to attend to the formalities with the master of the pilot-vessel who had just arrived aboard.

"For the next two weeks during our short trip away from that place this disciple of Lecky never deviated from his old routine, from his skilful navigational methods. He skirted coasts as he always had done—coasts that other ships avoided like the plague—in order to make the fullest use of favourable currents and tidal sets. His courage and self-confidence seemed in no way altered. During his years of shiphandling he must have saved his owners many thousands of pounds. We told ourselves that surely these things would be taken into account; that this man who by his skill and the winds of heaven could take a square rigger across the world, through storm and sun and the intricacies of the treacherous seas; who had handled without accident many steamers through all the vicissitudes of a ship's life; surely, we argued, the owners would be respectable, lenient, and do the right thing.

"Out of earshot, I say, we thrashed out the incident. The mate, the chief engineer, and myself checked over the steering system with meticulous regard. Not a single fault could we discover. The ship had always behaved well, and she continued to steer through the intense calms and the turbulent monsoon seas with her customary fidelity.

'And so we returned again to our loading port to find a small strange vessel doing pilotage duty on the station and the once perfect victim of our shearing stem lying torn and unkempt on a mud-bank up the river where she had been beached to prevent her sinking. And there was a new master too, ready to take over from him. It was a sad moment when he left us, but I think that in the firmness of our hand-clasps and the message in our eyes, he grasped and accepted with gratitude what we could not bring ourselves to say—the magnitude of our unbroken faith.

'I can see him now, his uniform suit dazzlingly white in the merciless glare of the sun, his face a dark-red shadow beneath the pith helmet; his hand steady on the manrope of the shore gangway. He paused for perhaps two seconds, as if taking a last lingering survey of a ship that had defeated him; then his eyes hardened suddenly, he turned about and walked off with something approaching his old virile step, and he never once looked back.

'Something seemed to have gone with him too, from the ship. Things were never quite the same; the old ways were changed; the spirit of comradeship that had been the essence of our life seemed to have lost its fortifying property like a sparkling glass of wine that stands overlong and becomes flat and uninteresting. The tranquil course of our service became disturbed, as a placid sunny sea is altered by cat's-paws of wind. The mate and the chief engineer began counting the weeks when their service on the coast would be finished. The incident and our late master were not spoken of—the subject became taboo. And yet each of us gave it a considerable amount of thought. In the dark watches up there on her bridge I wrestled with the thing continually. What had happened? Why had we rammed the cursed beautiful thing? Was it an error of judgment, over-confidence, an example of the blind spot of a man's intelligence—or a mere mechanical defect of the ship? Perhaps some cursed and diabolical tidal stream acting down there on our deep-draughted hull? I couldn't answer my own questions. But I could picture the panelled London office with the rows of ledgers on the shelves, the letter files, and the ten-foot builders' model of a similar ship in a glass case; nautical-looking calendars on the wall sent by firms selling rope and paint and canvas; the big table with the chart of the river approaches; match-boxes for models and a pencil for the wind; the glib talk of men whose brains are shrewd but whose knowledge of the sea begins at Brighton and ends in victualling allowances. I could hear the inevitable, damning questions.

"Now, just suppose, Captain, that you had given her a wider berth—say another couple of hundred yards! In the beautiful

prevailing weather conditions that wouldn't have made a hazardous journey for the pilot's boat—would it now? And all this depressing and unfortunate business would never have occurred at all—would it? No. That's right. You see, what we really fail to understand."

'You see, as he said, there was no excuse.'

## II

'Well,' my companion went on, 'we loaded for the Cape—an uncomfortable run in July. We boiled and roasted in the river; we staggered encrusted with salt through the dripping wind and high head-seas of a fierce monsoon; we were blasted by the howling westerly gales of a Cape winter, struggling up and over and through the great swells that only the Southern Ocean can produce. But I would like to pass on to the day we sailed from Capetown.'

'It was a grey, Cape day with a fresh westerly wind, a moderate sea, and a threat of rain. We were glad to be away, eager to renew our acquaintance with the heat and moil we so often cursed. In ballast, we rolled our way round Cape Point and turned to the east. Our new master, anxious to emulate some of his predecessor's runs, laid the course close to the coast in order to make use of the strong easterly counter current and thus avoid the well-known Agulhas farther out. By noon we were doing, with strong quartering wind and favourable set, about fifteen knots over the ground—quite an achievement for us in a steamer that averaged about ten.'

'In the reeling chartroom I held on to the long table and studied for a few minutes the large-scale chart laid out there. The great swell bore us aloft and dragged us down into immense valleys, and all the time without pause we rolled heavily forward along a frowning coast. It was now my watch until four, so I went out through the wheel-house to the port wing of the bridge where the third mate passed me the usual information, then went below. Normally he would return at half-past twelve to relieve me for the mid-day meal. The master, following me out, stood by my side.

"I have told Mr.——," he said, "to take his lunch first today. By the time he is finished we should be past that rock. I would like you to be up here then. We should pass a mile outside. Keep the bearings going and don't let her set in."

"Yes; very good, sir," I replied. "I'll watch her." And with that he, too, went below. It was then fifteen minutes after noon. I should, I suppose, have felt flattered at his remark, but I thought the change in routine a discouraging thrust at the young third mate. Why could the Master not have stayed up himself? That was more usual. It hurt

no one's pride. Perhaps, I thought, he was afraid that his soup would get cold.

"The rock he had mentioned was an isolated spot on the chart; for the coast is everywhere precipitous and steep-to, and comfortably free from out-lying dangers. A mile was a reasonable distance to pass the thing, which was awash at low water, under the existing conditions of daylight and good visibility.

"Well, I did keep the bearings going. Every few minutes I obtained a good fix, staying in the chartroom for as short a time as possible; for I was anxious to see the effect of the big swell on that rock. Between the bearings I swept the undulating offing for the tell-tale signs, but between the ship and the black forbidding coast, with the bases of its precipitous cliffs lost in a mist of wind-driven spume, there was nothing but an endless succession of crests, rearing lines of water racing on towards the shore.

"A position at twelve-thirty provided the first shock—it was well inside the soft-pencilled line laid down on the chart. She was setting in quickly. I wondered if I had made a mistake, but no, the cocked hat of the three bearings was small; I called, in Hindustani, to the quartermaster standing swaying and bare-footed on the grating.

"Starboard—ten degrees!"

"Ah, sahib. Ten degrees starboard."

"Dividers in hand, I measured the distance to run, and found it was two miles. That seems a long way, but at fifteen knots it is only eight minutes of time. I dropped the instruments as if they were hot, and stepped out again to search for that cursed outlying obstruction.

"A sudden startled cry from the wheel-house stepped up my normal heart-beats to hammer-blows inside my chest, jerking me to a state of instant alertness.

"*Dekko, sahib! Dekko, sahib!*" He had seen the thing before me. There it was, fine on the port bow, just a cloud of mist that seemed to race backwards over the moving crests. A glance at the sky beyond showed the truth and dispelled the illusion of movement which the yawing of the ship's head, too, was creating.

"I relaxed inwardly; for the unseen danger is the father and mother of suspense, and suspense is a dangerous emotion. I gave the order for the helm to be put hard over, determined to get the danger well out on the port bow—on the beam if necessary—so long as I kept the ship well outside to seaward.

"Hard over, sahib!"

"Five minutes, perhaps, to go. The mist was denser, bigger, higher. I jammed myself between a stanchion and the open door of the wheel-house, waiting for the swing of the ship's head. Nothing



happened! Suspense returned with a tightening of the chest and abdomen that I had not before experienced. I stepped quickly into the wheel-house and looked at the polished brass helm indicator on the pedestal—it showed extreme starboard helm. Still she didn't swing.

'A sudden urge to do something practical—give some task to my hands—seized me. I pushed the man from the grating and took the wheel myself, saying, "Captain sahib *bolow. Juldi, juldi,*" and the fellow disappeared like a frightened shadow.

'The forward windows of the wheel-house were open, for the wind was following. There it was, still fine on the port bow. A little black showed every now and then between the great crests of the swell; the spray was flung up and over in a great cloud of wind-driven drops. I could hear the singing of the turbines and the loud ticking of the wheelhouse clock above my head. The engine telegraph standing polished and gleaming held a sudden and silent fascination. No! I would not touch it. That would be fatal. I knew the time it takes to get the engines from full ahead to full astern even with the engineers waiting for it. I knew how far the ship would run before stopping. Time and distance had a new significance. I knew the immediate loss of steering that "full astern" incurs.

'I suppose that in those two minutes I was seized by some form of demoralising mental panic. I thought of lifeboats, their uses and their weaknesses; the awful hideous shock that would occur when she struck; I gripped those spokes with a fierce and crushing clasp. Where the devil was that *seccummi* and the Master? Why didn't he come? The perspiration began to form under the band of my peaked cap; a drop ran down my face, leaving a cold wet line. Through the mist that was forming over my eyeballs the black mass grew suddenly large and diabolically cruel, with the great swell creaming over it and the spray hurled skywards. I was left alone, with a ship that refused to steer, hurtling on to destruction. There it was, the bearing remaining constant. Fragments of stuff I knew off by heart flew to my tongue. I could hear myself repeating the words and the booming of the reef getting louder.

'"Nothing in these rules shall exonerate . . . from the neglect to keep a proper look-out . . . or of any precaution . . . by the special circumstances of the case."

'The clock behind me stopped. A voice in my ear—and it was *his* voice—said very calmly, "She wouldn't steer for me either. She tricked me. It is the end and there is no excuse. Only you and I will understand."

'The ticking of the clock recommenced. There was a sudden rush

of feet up the starboard ladder and the Master stood in front of me, his table napkin in his hand, his mouth not yet emptied of food.

"Helm hard over?" His voice was curt.

"Hard over, sir," I replied. "She won't come up."

His broad back shut out the view of the rock, but I could still see the spray flying up in a great cloud like a hail-storm in reverse.

"She's coming up now," he replied, and the words seemed like a cooling pack laid upon my burning forehead. I looked at the iron davit over the stem tracing a great yawing ellipse, sometimes on the sky, sometimes on the sea, but slowly, slowly creeping towards the south. And there was I, with the helm jammed hard against the stop and the native quartermaster standing with pendulous lips and protruding dark eyes beside me. I never knew his thoughts; but I wished at that moment for a little of the faith that the relic round his neck was imparting to his simple soul.

The clock ticked on. Then a great noise grew out from ahead, drowning out all other noises of the ship. We were borne aloft on the crest of a Southern Ocean greybeard; the land was obscured by an immense cloud of upward flying spray that seemed to rise vertically from somewhere below our port bilges. Would the awful grinding crash and shudder never come?

I glanced quickly through the port window and looked down through the moving screen of drops on to a black and glistening smooth stretch of rock that was the bottom of the sea. A second, and it was gone, covered with creaming water that roared across it in seething boiling anger. The whole fabric of the ship shuddered with the deafening thunder of the noise, with the roaring turbulence of ten thousand tons of water gone mad. But it was the vibration of sound alone, of the awful eternal contest of the greatest forces of the world.

I saw the Master turn, shouting, but his voice was lost in that thunderous sound. Only by the gesture of his arm did I know his meaning. I let go the wheel to ease the helm. Instead of recoiling back to the midship position it stayed where it was, slack, without life. And the little black finger behind the glass of the pressure gauge showed no pressure in the hydraulic system, as if the fluid had frozen in the pipes with sheer fright. The murderous roar passed away astern, like dying thunder rolling behind high hills. The sounds of the ship crept back.

"Cutting things a bit fine, aren't you?" The Master's voice sounded weak, puny as the cry of a child when the shouting of a multitude ceases. His face was strained; his eyes blinked once or

twice quickly. He wiped his forehead and the back of his neck with the crumpled napkin. I read the blame in his eyes.

"*She is,*" I answered. "Some day she is going to commit suicide; but, by God, before that I will go through this steering system with a fine-tooth comb. I will discover why she chooses such moments as this to display her rottenness."

"He stepped aft beside me to observe the pressure gauges on the pedestal. "Nothing wrong with the steering. Usual pressure there," he said. "Keep her out a point for the set. I'll be up after I have my coffee."

"I looked at the gauges. The pressures were normal. He was right. And with a sense of defeat, of having been tricked, I stepped from the grating and gave the course to the Indian quartermaster.

"*Atcha, sahib,*" he said, smiling. "*Abi teke-ai.* Yes, now it is all right."

My companion on the wooden bench ceased speaking, and by a quick sideways glance I saw that, for him at the moment, I did not exist: neither did the river nor the great granite breakwater spread out like a protecting arm from the northern shore. He seemed to be looking beyond, seeing the things, the big things of life which had been denied to me—until now. There was a trace of glistening moisture on the brown unfurrowed brow beneath the brim of his hat; his broad and freckled hands were still clasped together between his knees.

A sudden, powerful blast from the whistle of a big steamer emerging out of the murk brought him back from the undulating vastness of a Southern Ocean; from the burning delta of a great river.

A weak ray of winter afternoon sunshine piercing the grey pall overhead fell upon the bright new dry-dock paint of the steamer's boot-topping and topsides. She glided nearer on her way out to the sea with the low hum of turbines and the thump of a half-immersed screw beating the water. Her ensign and house flag hung limp and lifeless in the still air.

Getting to his feet the young man read aloud the white-lettered legend on her bow, and his face was still hard.

"That," he said, "is the ship *he* could not bear to see again. Come, let us take the road to the shore."

# BOUND FOR RIO GRANDE

BY A. E. DINGLE

## I

THE old man's broken teeth gleamed through tight, thin lips whenever his rheumy eyes glimpsed the lofty spars of the clipper in the bay. She was the only deepwaterman in port.

'Blood boat!' he chattered. 'A blood boat. But you don't git no more o' my blood, not by a damn sight!'

Hastily turning away, the old man shambled along the wharf, at the end of which stood an office. Opposite the office, bright and cheery against the grey and dirt of the waterside, a tiny store kept its door open, revealing an interior to set the pulses of an ancient mariner leaping. Never a yellow oilskin, nor a bit of rope; nor one block or shackle offended the eye grown weary through half a century of salty servitude.

Glossy plugs of black tobacco; clay pipes of virgin whiteness and lissome shape; woolly comforters and stout shore-going winter socks; old, tasty cheese and soft, white bread; fat sausage and luscious, boneless ham; all these things, mere fancies of the dreaming sailor-man at sea, were clear to the view of old Pegwell through the open door of the little store as he paced up and down before the office, waiting for the man to whom he was to make application for the job of watchman of the wharf.

There was a sharp hint of frost in the air; a sharper threat of wind. There was just enough of brine and breeze, just a trace. It smelt of salt water and of boats, with never an obtrusive reminder of hard-case deepwater ships.

Ah! There was a snug harbour indeed for a battered old seadog. If a chap could expect to come at last into such a fair haven as that little store now he wouldn't mind a few decades of bitter travail at sea.

'Hell's delight! Fat chance I got o' savin' money now!' he growled.

He sought for a match, found none. It was just his luck. But he had a few pennies. He would buy matches in that store. He waited until the stream of lunch customers thinned out, and entered.

'Box o' lucifers,' he demanded, slapping down the coin. His eyes wandered around the homely little place. There were things he had not noticed before from outside. Red candy; bright painted toys; rubber balls. Children came there evidently. What sort of children would come to that neighbourhood for toys?

'Your matches, sir,' said a rippling, laughing voice; and old Pegwell turned around sharply and discovered why children might well come to that store. Men, too. A twenty-year-old girl was offering him matches. Her big brown eyes danced mischievously. She was as trim as a brand-new China clipper.

'Thank 'e, ma'am,' said Pegwell, as he grabbed the matches and shuffled out, dazzled and confused by the vision. He was still dazzled, his box of matches unopened, when he stumbled against the man he had waited to see.

'Heard you wanted a watchman, sir,' said old Pegwell respectfully. He proffered a bundle of ship's discharges as evidence of character. The man glanced through them, glanced keenly at the old man, and nodded.

'Night work,' he said. 'Six to six. If you suit, in a month I'll give you a day shift, turn and turn about. Nothing much to do here, but you'll have to watch out for strangers. Lot of crooks on the water nowadays. Rum, dope, all sorts. Start to-night.'

Old Pegwell had landed his first shore job. For the first time since starting out to earn his own living he could afford to gaze curiously at a sailorman, going large, staggering along to the next blind pig.

'Sailors is a lot o' lummoxes,' he decided.

'Like kids.'

*'If yuh save up yer money, an' don't git on the rocks,  
Yuh'll have plenty o' tobacker in yer old tobacker box.'*

he sang quaveringly.

He pulled up sharply, ceasing his song, and drifted over toward the little store again. He would have to find some place to live, to sleep at least. That girl looked different from others he had known. Perhaps she would tell him where to seek. He walked in, more confidently than before. He had a shore job now.

'Plug o' tobacker, miss,' he asked for. The girl appeared from behind a provision case, putting on a smile as she emerged. A man thrust back deeper into the shadow. Pegwell saw nothing of the forced smile or the man. His eyes were roving, taking in the wealth of the stock. When he turned to take his tobacco the girl's smile was sunny enough. He felt encouraged.

'Beg y'pardon, miss. I just got a job on th' wharf, and thought

likely you could direc' me where to git a bed, cheap. I ain't a pertickler chap. Just es long's there ain't too many bugs, or——'

'You got a job on the wharf?' interrupted a man's voice. A youth, who might have been good-looking if he could have changed his eyes, came from behind the provision case and scowled surlily. 'What job?'

'Watchman,' said Pegwell importantly. 'Night watchman. Know any place I kin get a doss?'

'How did you get to hear about this job? I'm livin' here right along, lookin' for a job, and a stranger comes along and lands it over my head. You're a sailor, ain't you?'

'No; watchman,' retorted old Pegwell. 'Was a sailorman. Had good discharges. I'm a watchman now. D'you know of a place I kin sleep, miss?'

The youth dragged the girl aside, and they muttered together, ignoring Pegwell. Presently the girl spoke sharply, angrily.

'It's best for you to go away, Larry. It's a good thing you never heard of the wharf job. Too many old friends hanging around there! You've signed on in the *Stella*. Now you go. You know what the judge said. Go to work, like a decent fellow, and you won't be watched like a——'

'Go to work? Heli! I'm willing to go to work, Mary, but what d'you want to shove me off into a damned old square rigger for? Ain't there work to be got——'

'It's best that you go away for a while,' insisted the girl. 'You were lucky to escape jail when that gang of smugglers got caught. I'm not sure now that the judge was satisfied about you. If you stay around here they're sure to watch you——'

'Beg pardon, miss, but if you know of a place——' interrupted Pegwell impatiently. Larry swung around and grinned crookedly.

'All right, sister,' he told her. 'I'll do it to please you.' He took Pegwell's arm. 'I'll find you a bed, old timer. What time d'you go to work?'

'Six. Want to get a sleepin' place afore that.'

'Meet me here at five-thirty. I'll have a bunk for you by then.'

Pegwell started off for a walk, but streets were a barren wilderness to him. He gravitated toward the harbour. He found himself somehow in front of the little store. It was a long time from five-thirty. Methodically he noted the contents of the window, grew amazed at the number and variety.

'Larry hasn't come back yet,' the girl called out from the store. 'Won't you wait inside?'

Pegwell looked sheepish. Sailors of the deep waters were always

easily abashed in the presence of a decent woman. Pegwell scarcely dared to look up from the floor as he entered. But the girl began to chatter to him, and he felt at ease when she handed him a match for his cold pipe. In ten minutes he was spinning her fearsome yarns. In half an hour they were friends. She confided little scraps of her own affairs.

'Larry's a good fellow,' she said, a bit sadly. 'Too good. He's easy to lead. There has been a lot of smuggling along the front lately, and he ought to have kept away. But he always seems to have money, never goes to work, and when a big capture was made he was under suspicion. The judge told him he had better go to work, then folks would be apt to believe that he was innocent. Of course he is innocent! My brother Larry couldn't be a crook, Mr. Pegwell. But he has been under suspicion, and I made him join that big sailing ship, the *Stella*, for a voyage. When he comes back everything will be forgotten, and he can—Oh, here's Jack! Excuse me, Mr. Pegwell.'

A tall, brown-faced man of thirty limped in. Pegwell was no keen-eyed Solon concerning women of Mary Bland's sort; but when he saw her pretty face light up and her big brown eyes flash at the appearance of this good-looking fellow who limped on a shortened leg, he knew he was intruding. Puffing furiously at his pipe, he stumped out upon the front.

At five-thirty Larry found Pegwell sitting on the cap log of the wharf.

'Come on, old timer. I got a fine bunk for you,' said Larry. Pegwell followed him.

'I heard you be goin' in th' *Stella*,' remarked Pegwell.

'I ain't proud of it,' retorted Larry.

'I just come home in her. A hell ship, she is! Can sail, though. You ain't old an' stiff. Do yer work an' don't give th' mates no slack, an' you'll be all kiff, me son.'

Larry glanced curiously at the queer old man who thought fit to preach duty to him.

They turned down by a disused and evil-smelling fish dock, out of sight of a growing district.

'Have to cross the creek in a boat,' grinned Larry. 'Save time, see. You have to be on the job, now, but other times you can walk around. Here y' are.'

At the foot of a perpendicular ladder of boards nailed on a slimy pile a boat lay. Three husky boatmen grinned up knowingly at Larry. A blue canvas sea bag lay in the bottom of the boat, doubled up, like a dead man.

'Take good care of my old friend,' Larry ordered. He gently drew

Pegwell to the ladder. 'Hurry up, old timer, Soon's they see you snug they have to come back for me.'

Pegwell stepped on the ladder.

'Ho!' he said. 'That's your sea bag, hey? Well, me son, do yer work an' give the mates no slack, an'——'

Something heavy fell upon his grey old head. He tumbled into the boat. As he pitched forward Pegwell heard the laugh of his friend Larry, and he realised the treatment awaiting him.

The tall clipper put to sea. On her forecathlehead men tramped drearily around the capstan. Hard-bitten officers cursed them; an exasperated tugboat skipper bawled; the anchor clung tenaciously to the mud.

*An' awa-ay, Rio! Awa-ay Rio!  
Sing fare yew well, my bonny young gal,  
We are boun' for Rio Grande!*

A quavery, broken old pipe raised that chantey. The mate left the knighthead, plunging in among the desolate crew, thumping, thumping, cursing venomously.

'You sojers!' he yelled. 'You double-left-legged sojers! Here's old Noah come to life again, and you let him show you your work! Heave, blind you! Heave! Sing out, old Noah! Why, damn my eyes, if it ain't old Pegwell come with us again!'

The mate stood off a pace, staring at Pegwell. Sailormen rarely made two voyages in the *Stella*.

'I didn't join, sir,' protested Pegwell, ceasing his song. All the men stopped. Pegwell had tried to persuade the captain he was not one of his crew as soon as he recovered his wits. The result had been painful. 'I got to be on the job at six, sir. I'll lose my new job. I wuz shanghaied——'

A fist thumped him hard between the shoulders, driving him back to his capstan bar with coughing lungs.

'Sing out! Start something! Heave, damn you!' retorted the mate, and fell upon the miserable gang tooth and nail. The tug hooted owlshly.

*A jolly good ship, an' a jolly good crew:  
Awa-ay, Rio!  
A jolly good mate, an' a good skipper, too,  
An' we're boun' for Rio Grande!*

Pegwell tramped around the capstan. A donkey yoked to the bar of a mill. A sailor bound by a lifetime of hard usage to a habit of obedience.



Pegwell's bunk had bugs. All the bunks had bugs. Pegwell's bunk was beneath a sweat leak where a bit of dry rot had crumbled a corner of a deck beam. But Larry's sea bag, a blue canvas bag made by a sailorman, revealed itself full of amazing comforts. The old fellow had never owned such a bag. There were blankets. Woollen, not woolly. Warm underwear, stockings, shirts. Good oilskins, leakproof boots. There was a real steel razor; a real steel sheath-knife. A great bundle of soap and matches; white enamelware dish and pannikin; and a dainty thing that puzzled Pegwell until he opened it. It was a folder of blue cloth, tied about with a silken cord. On the flat side was worked in silk, beautifully, 'Larry; from Mary.'

Inside, cunning pockets were full of needles, thread, buttons, scissors. And tucked into the innermost fold was a note, in a slender hand bearing signs of stress, bidding Larry act the man, wishing him luck, praying for his safe return. The feel of it gave old Pegwell a warm thrill.

'Hey, me son, I want that bunk!' he announced grimly, shaking the shoulder of a sleeping ordinary seaman whose bunk was leakless. 'C'm on. Out of it! Able seamen comes fust, me lad.'

Pegwell carefully placed his needle case in a dry place, then hauled the youth out on to the filthy floor, cotton blanket and all. Even youth must yield to experience when youth is seasick, and experience runs along lines of deep water pully-haul.

Pegwell now had the cleanest, driest bunk in the forecastle. He stole lemons from the steward, which he hid cunningly. From time to time he cut one in slices, fastened it to ship's side or bunk board, thereby driving puzzled bugs to other, less exclusive quarters. He stole nails from Chips; made shelves for his little comforts, pegs for his fine new clothes. He stole a bit of white line from the bosun and made a pair of flat sennit bands by which his spare blankets swung from the bunk above.

By the time the clipper crossed the line Pegwell only dimly remembered Larry's treachery. He only mistily recalled the job he had got but had never worked at. It was easy for the old man to slip back into the habits of a lifetime; even though the ship was a hard place. The great outstanding point was that for the first time in his dreary life old Pegwell sailed deep water possessed of everything necessary for comfort, and some luxuries to boot. And this he owed to Mary Bland.

Old Pegwell usually fell asleep with a flash-back of memory to a snug little store on a dingy waterside, overladen with a stock of wonders, presided over by a laughing girl whose big, brown, friendly eyes sometimes held just a trace of trouble. Then he would

think darkly of Larry, only to sink into sound slumber in the warmth of Larry's woollies under Larry's blankets.

## II

Pegwell's bunk was no longer dry. No man's bunk was. The forecastle was a reeling, freezing, weeping dungeon peopled with miserable devils to whom hell would have been heaven. For thirty days the clipper had been battered by a northwesterly gale off Cape Horn.

When a man came from the wheel after a two hours' trick he was blue, and tottery, and grinning, and more than a little insane.

Pegwell stood his wheel warm and dry. He felt the bitterness of the weather and the ship's stress, but for once his old bones were not racked with extreme cold. The ship steered badly. They sent the young ordinary seamen to hold the lee spokes.

'You just put yer weight to it when I shoves the helm up or down, me son,' said Pegwell. The lad's teeth chattered; his lanky body, under-nourished, 'twixt boy and man, shook like a royal mast under a thrashing sail.

'Y—yessir!' he chattered, fearfully.

Pegwell glanced sharply at the lad once or twice. Since their first encounter over the change of bunks, the lad had not been remarkable for politeness toward the old man. But there was no hint of impudence in that 'Yessir!' The boy looked blue.

Grumbling, taking a hand from the wheel when he could, gripping a spoke desperately to check it, the old man peeled off his heavy monkey jacket.

'Slip into this yer jacket, me son!' he roared, and put his shoulder to the spokes, bringing the ship to her course before the mate arrived. The lad thawed. When the watch was up, he was glowing. Old Pegwell was warm, but wet through with driving snow. He watched his chance to shuffle along the main deck between seas. The lad, less cautious, started first.

When they were in the deep waist, the new helmsman let the ship go off and a mile long hissing sea reared up and fell aboard the length of her. Pegwell grabbed a lifeline. When the decks cleared themselves through the ports, he clawed his way choking and blinded to the forecastle, soaked to the skin, his broken teeth chattering with the icy chill.

'Where's th' young feller?' he chattered.

'I see him bashed up against th' galley,' growled the man nearest. 'He'll git here. Can't lose them kind.'

He didn't 'git here.' The young ordinary seaman never rounded the Horn. He went overboard to death wearing old Pegwell's monkey jacket.

Making northing and westing with dry decks, though the wind was bitterly cold, men with all the sailorman's improvidence discarded tattered oilskins and soggy socks. And with all the fiendish frailty of Cape Horn weather, the fair wind blew itself out, a rolling calm followed, and then another, fiercer northwesterly gale shrieked down and drove the ship back into the murderous grey seas to the southward.

Pegwell clambered stiffly out of the rigging after re-tying the points of the reefed main topsail. The maindeck was a seething chaos of rope-snarled water. In the roaring torrent men were being hurled along the deck. Only a frantically waving arm or leg indicated that a man was not dead. Then a greater sea thundered aboard. It smashed the boat gallows. The boats hung over the side, precariously held by the ropes.

A spare topmast was torn loose from chain lashings and chocks: a massive stick of Oregon pine, roughly squared, it hurtled aft on the torrent, broke a sailor's half drowned body cruelly, and crashed end on against the poop bulkhead.

Pegwell and the watch fought with the spar. The seas ended the timber with devilish spite. Twice all hands were torn from their hold, rolled about the flooded decks in the icy water, battered near to death by the murderous stick.

In a lull they secured the spar. The boats were gone. They picked up tangled gear, and took two mangled men from the meshes.

The wind struck afresh. It staggered the ship. And while she staggered and hung poised another chuckling sea climbed over the six foot bulwarks and filled her decks.

'Bill's hurted bad now, sir,' screamed Pegwell, shivering in the grip of cold and numb agony. Bill was the bosun. He hung twisted and pallid between the two men who lifted him. They bore him forward. Chips stood across the sill of the smashed door of the tiny cabin they shared.

'This ain't no place for a hurted man!' Chips grumbled. 'Tell th' Old Man he ought t' be took care of aft.'

They told the skipper.

'No room aft,' the skipper howled at them. 'Put him in the fore-castle if it's any drier.'

They bore the man below. Instinctively they laid him in old Pegwell's bunk, for it was driest. All were wet. Pegwell's at least boasted woollen coverings.

Pegwell himself covered the silent form with a blanket. He needed no hint to cover the pallid face too. He made no protest when a sailor gently pulled another blanket from under the bosun. 'Jack's cruel cold, mate,' said the sailor. He wrapped Jack, another storm victim, in the blanket with roughened hands that trembled.

Overhead the seas thundered on deck. The *Stella* fought her stubborn way against the gale under three lower topsails, reefed upper main topsail, and treble reefed foresail with a ribbon of fore topmast staysail.

The gale died out. A fair wind came. The ship sped north again, scarred but sound, clothed in new canvas, triumphant. They buried Bill and Jack in Pegwell's bedding.

By this time Pegwell had little left of his grand outfit. As the rags of his mates gave out, he grumblingly gave of his store. Grumbled and gave. That was Pegwell. But he never let go of that little blue cloth needle case inscribed, 'Larry; from Mary.' Slyly he had picked at the stitches until the word 'Larry' was becoming indistinguishable. When a few more threads fell out he could show his treasure to incredulous sailormen, and they would never know that the obliterated name was not his own.

The crew scuttled from the *Stella* like rats when she docked. Only Pegwell hung on. Alone of the outward bound crew before the mast, he stubbornly resisted all the efforts of the mates to get him out. They could ship a new crew homeward at half the wages paid outward. None of the deserters waited for their wages. Their forfeited pay was so much profit to the ship. But Pegwell refused to be driven out. Cheerless and bare his bunk might be. It was. There was always the little blue folded housewife to remind him that he had a shore job once over against a snug little store. And the ambition that had flamed then still burned.

As for quitting the ship, Pegwell had wages due. Not a lot, but wages still. If he completed the voyage, drawing no advance whatever, buying nothing from the slop chest, he would have coming to him a nice little nest egg which might hatch into a home at last. That nest egg loomed big to the captain.

'Set him to chipping cable,' said the skipper. 'Work him up!'

The mates worked him up, cruelly, but they could not work him out.

Homeward bound round the Horn, Pegwell showed his little blue housewife to the new hands. They were a hard lot. They made ribald fun about it. They stole his poor bedding, and dared him to identify it. He endured. They stole his sea boots. Pegwell endured that, too.

But somebody stole his little blue housewife, worked in silk, '—; from Mary,' and there was a fight.

It was a young weasel of a wastrel who tried to prevent Pegwell from taking back his treasure. A weasel bred in the muck of the water front; cunning and full of devious fighting tricks. But the old seaman fought on sure feet on a reeling deck; fought with righteous fury swelling his breast; fought without feeling the brutal knee or the gouging thumb. And he beat his man, recovered his treasure, and earned much freedom from molestation.

In the bleak, soul-searching gales off Cape Stiff, Pegwell suffered intensely. He shivered and froze in silence.

The old sailor had always his little blue cloth treasure. He whispered his troubles to it as he shivered in his wet bed—it was the one comfort nobody could take from him. He might shake with cold and wet all through a watch below, but there was ever before him the vision of that snug little store, the pretty, laughing girl whose big brown eyes yet held a trace of trouble. Somehow he grew to fasten the responsibility for that trouble on Larry. And, once established, his own grievance against the man smouldered fiercer.

When the tall clipper furled her sails in her home port again, Pegwell's bitterness against Larry Bland had intensified to such a degree as to surprise the old chap himself. Bitterness formed no part of his real nature. But it was winter again; the snow fell; the streets, from the ship, looked dreary and inhospitable. And old Pegwell had nothing but rags to cover his aching bones.

The rest of the fo'mast hands had drawn something on account of wages and gone ashore to spend that and mortgage the balance due. But not old Pegwell. He would carry ashore every dollar coming to him from the voyage he ought never to have made. He would buy a suit of clothes and stout shoes that would last, put the rest of his money in safe hands, then look for Larry.

'It'll be him and me fer it!' he muttered.

### III

The ship paid off. Soulless wretches who had whined and cringed under the punishment of the sea rolled up bold and blustering, full of hot courage at twenty-five cents a hot shot, cursing captain and mates and ship as they took their pitiful pay.

In an hour Pegwell entered the little store, and in ten seconds more a Cape Horn Voyage in a cardcase jacket was a vanished horror. The big brown eyes of Mary Bland glistened with welcome, even though at first they had been cloudy with uncertainty.

'I am so glad to see you again, Pegwell,' she cried. 'It was so good of you to change places with Larry. I hope you had a good voyage. Won't you come inside?'

Pegwell grinned sourly as he followed her into the snug little room behind the shop. He had meant to say something about that change of jobs. Instead, with a warmth seeping through his bones clear to his heart, mellowing it again, he forgot Larry and smoked himself into rosy visions under the musical spell of her voice.

In an hour they were as intimate as before the *Stella* went out. Mary had told him, shyly, that Jack wanted a speedy wedding; she had barely hinted that brother Larry was a stumbling block, immediately suppressing the hint. She had offered to work Pegwell's name into the little blue housewife where the word 'Larry' had been picked out; and when she took it from him her eyes were suspiciously moist. Pegwell noticed it, though the girl tried hard to hide her feelings.

Then Jack came in and old Pegwell went out. The gladness in Mary's eyes, the pride in those of the stalwart cripple, gave the old man a thrill. It made him boil, too. There was a couple just aching for each other, hindered by a waster of a brother not worth a crocodile's tear.

'Hullo, old Pegwell,' smiled Jack as he passed. He stuck out a strong brown hand in a hearty grip. 'Mighty glad to see you again. Ought to stay this time. Going to buy Mary's shop, she tells me. Hurry up, old fellow. She's keeping me waiting all on your account.'

Jack laughed, and went to Mary's side, leaving Pegwell wondering. He waited out in the cold street until Jack came out, then joined him in his walk and put the question bluntly:

'What's Larry up to?'

Jack was serious. His smile fled at the blunt demand. Anger was in his eyes, but he dismissed it. Pegwell, shrewder perhaps than he was given credit for being, noticed these little things. He put two and two together handily enough, and found the amount was four—no more or less.

'I wish Larry would either get bumped off or caught with the goods, Pegwell,' Jack said. 'He's breaking Mary's heart. She won't believe any wrong about him, yet she knows he's bound hellbent for ruin. If he was dead she would be better off. The rat has taken all her little savings and is about eating up her profits now. She won't marry, though God knows Larry's way of living don't influence a bit where she's concerned. If Larry got sent up for a long stretch it would be better for Mary, though she would mourn him as if he was dead. I wish she would get rid of the store, quit this neighbourhood,

and let me make her happy. But she won't, as long as that rat is loose.'

'Didn't 'e go to work on the dock?' asked Pegwell, raging. 'E bunged me off on th' *Stella* and took my job, didn't he?'

'He held the job for one week and quit,' Jack replied. 'He said he'd made a killing at the races. Two watchmen since have either fallen off the dock at night or been thrown off.' Jack was silent for a moment.

'Pegwell,' said Jack at length, 'I'm glad you're home. You can do a lot for Mary. I ought not to mention this to a soul; but I believe you are her friend.'

'Friend?' rasped Pegwell. 'Mister, you're bloody foolish! That little gal kin use me fer a door mat an' I'll show you what sort of a friend I am fust time I set eyes on that Larry!'

'Not so loud,' Jack whispered. They passed a policeman, who nodded to Jack. 'Pegwell, they're out to get Larry now! I have done all I can. I can't shield him any longer. He's out of town for a while, but when he comes back he's going to be jumped on, and he'll get ten years.'

'Wot d'you think I can do?' demanded Pegwell. 'Can I save him when you can't? Want me to go up for him, same as I made a Cape voyage in a hell ship for him?' The old man was furious.

'You can only be a friend and comfort to Mary,' said Jack quietly. Pegwell's wrinkled face was screwed up grotesquely with the intensity of his thought.

'Seems to me,' he said, 'if you was to sort of hurry her into a weddin', maybe you could do a bit o' comfortin' yourself. If I had money enough to offer to buy her shop off her I c'd take care o' the Larry rat.'

'Oh, you have money enough,' retorted Jack quietly. 'Mary said long ago you could pay out of the profits. You only need about a hundred to pay down. I guess you have that much.'

Pegwell was apparently not listening; yet in fact he was. He seemed to be looking sheer through the cold, grey drizzle into the future, and if his worn, lined old face was any guide, what he saw in the dim perspective of imagination held more light than shadow.

'What's th' wust this yer Larry's done?' he suddenly asked. 'Killed anybody?'

'Oh, no,' replied Jack swiftly. 'Nothing like that.'

'Been wreckin' some young gal——'

'No more than he has wrecked Mary's youth,' Jack interrupted. 'He's just a plain crook. Dope smuggling; peddling, too. The worst he's done is to sell dope to school kids. Bad enough I'd say.'

'Not quite es bad as murder, I s'pose,' Pegwell growled, 'though be damned ef I know why it ain't. Anyhow, Jack, me lad, you take the advice of a old lummox, marry Mary whether she wants to or not, and I'll promise to take care o' Larry. I'll see he don't git sent up. You tell her. I be going round to-night again and see how fur you're right about that hundred down and hundred when you ketch me shop purchase propposition. S'long, Jack. Set them weddin' bells to ringin'.'

Late that night Mary Bland bade Pegwell good night at the door of the little shop. She was rosy and smiling. Her brown eyes were wide and bright. Pegwell had never seen her so completely alive and gladsome. She shook his hand twice, and just for a tiny instant a speck of cloud flickered in her eyes.

'If you believe you can help Larry, I know you can,' she said. 'I know he will be safe in your care, old Pegwell.'

'He'll git a man's chance, you kin make sartin,' stated Pegwell. 'Good night, Missy, an' Gawd keep you smilin'. I'll be around to meet Jack in the mornin' and settle about the shop. Forgit yer troubles. Th' cops don't want Larry. If they did they couldn't git him.'

At the end of the week Old Pegwell took undivided charge of the little shop, while Jack and Mary went about on some mysterious business connected with a licence. Old Pegwell stood in the door watching them, and his old pipe emitted clouds of smoke in sympathy with the depth of his breathing. He felt queerly tight about the heart.

'Gawd bless 'em, goddammit!' he barked chokily.

A man came to buy tobacco. The two men stared at each other.

'Damn my eyes if 't ain't old Pegwell!' roared the mate of the *Stella*. 'Come to moorings at last, hey, you old fox?'

'Aye, mister, you won't bullydam old Pegwell no more. When d'ye sail?'

The mate laughed, picking up his change.

'Next Saturday. I'll put yer name on yer old bunk. Or p'raps you'd like to sail bosun, hey?'

Pegwell laughed comfortably. He spread his feet wide as he stood again in the doorway, gazing after the rolling figure of the mate. At last, at last he was man enough to tell a first mate to go scratch his ear. He turned to go inside, for the air was cold in spite of the sun, and the shop must be kept warm, when a scurrying figure doubled the corner, burst in after him, and slammed the door.

Larry Bland stood there before him, panting, wild-eyed.

'Where's Mai y?' he rasped.



'Gone out, me son,' said Pegwell grimly. 'Just calm down. I own this here shop now. What kin I do for you?'

Larry glanced around the place furtively. He had a hunted look. Pegwell remembered Jack's words. A dark shape appeared against the glass of the door outside and Larry made for the inside room. Pegwell hastened him in as the door opened and a policeman entered.

'Larry Bland just came in here. Where is he?' he demanded.

'Orf'cer, Larry Bland shanghaied me a v'yage round Cape Stiff,' grinned Pegwell. 'D'you 'magine he'd come where I be?'

'I saw him open the door.'

'Aye, an' he dam' soon shut it again!'

The policeman stepped to the door of the inner room and peered inside. Old Pegwell heaved a tremendous sigh of relief when he quickly turned and bolted from the shop. Larry had taken care of his own concealment. He crawled in through a rear window when Pegwell called his name.

'Where's Mary gone?' he asked hoarsely. Larry looked scared. 'I got to get to her.'

'You can't get to her,' returned Pegwell. 'If it's the coppers you're scared of, lay low and keep your head. I won't let no cops git you, 'less you cuts up rough. You git upstairs to yer own room, while I thinks out what to do.'

'You ain't gettin' even are you?' snarled Larry suspiciously.

'In my own way, yes, me son. My way don't mean lettin' no cops git Mary Bland's brother. You duck into cover.'

When Mary and Jack returned she ran up to old Pegwell and kissed him warmly. She blushed at his gaze and shyly showed him a brand-new wedding ring. Jack laughed.

'I took your advice, Pegwell,' he said. 'No time like the present. So now you're sole proprietor here. We'll come back to-morrow to get Mary's few belongings. Just now I want her to myself. So long. Come, Mary!'

They left quickly, leaving old Pegwell hot with unspoken felicitations. Larry crept down. He had heard Mary's voice.

'Get outa sight!' snapped Pegwell. 'Dammit! The street's full o' coppers!'

Larry ducked. He was frankly terrified.

When Mary appeared in the morning to pack her things Larry was securely out of sight. Old Pegwell had been busy all night. He had made a stout, roomy chest, iron cleated and hinged. He had made Larry help him, keeping him in mind of the police. Now Larry crouched in the big chest in the cellar, while Mary sang happily and packed her small trifles in the bright little rooms above.

'I do hope you will enjoy every hour here, Pegwell,' Mary said, when ready to leave. 'Jack rather rushed me off my feet; but I'm glad, because he said you promised to see that Larry comes to no harm.'

'Missy,' replied Pegwell gravely, 'I won't let Larry get into no trouble with the police. I'm goin' to try to make a man outa him. So good luck to you, and God bless you. May all yer troubles be little 'uns, and if so be you wants a rattle, why——'

The old fellow glanced around the little shop, seeking for the bundle of rattles that hung somewhere; but he felt a warm, moist kiss on his cheek, the door opened, and she was gone.

On Thursday, the police visited the shop again. Larry was known to be in the district.

'He wuz here, but I ain't seen him to-day,' said Pegwell. The old chap was in a sweating fret. Larry was getting impatient. He had demanded to see his sister and threatened to take his chance on the street. Pegwell had to lock the chest on him.

'He's likely to come back then,' decided the officer in charge. 'One o' you camp here,' he told one of his men.

'I don't think he'll bother me much,' Pegwell volunteered. 'He done me dirt and knows I'll git even.'

Pegwell was outwardly cool; inwardly, when that policeman took up his station in the inner room, he was all a-quiver. The noon stream of customers came in and kept him busy; but he dreaded the quiet of the afternoon. Another policeman came to take a turn of duty over night, and slept in a chair in the back room. Pegwell, upstairs, remained awake all night, listening lest the officer go exploring, dreading every moment to hear some betraying sound from the cramped Larry in the cellar.

All day Friday he had no chance to give Larry either food or water. All he could do was to pass hurriedly by and murmur through the lid of the chest a few harsh words of reassurance that relief was at hand. In the evening he closed the shop, left the policeman in sole charge, and went out for an hour. When he came back again he began to make up several small parcels of tobacco.

'Got a bit o' trade from the *Stella*,' he told the policeman. 'Nothin' like slops and tobacker for profits, mister. Ever think o' startin' a shop?'

'Shop, hell!' growled the policeman. 'I deal in men, old salt.'

'Men is queer, that's true,' said Pegwell.

At eleven o'clock a cart rattled up to the door, loaded up with sea chests and bags, with two husky toughs beside the driver and a heap of brutish bodies snoring in the back.

'Come for th' slops an' tobacker,' they said.

'Here's th' tobacker,' said Pegwell. 'Slop chest is in th' basement. Pretty heavy. I'll give y' a hand.'

'We can handle it,' returned the huskies, and one of them winked at Pegwell.

Pegwell chatted to the policeman as he handed out the tobacco parcels. He talked loudly, calling the policeman 'officer' as the chest was carried past. That was for Larry's benefit. Otherwise Larry might wonder what was being done to him and make some unfortunate noise.

'All right?' asked Pegwell.

'O.K.', the leader said, and paid over the money he had been counting out to Pegwell. Pegwell carefully set it aside, to buy a wedding present for somebody he knew; then he joined the policeman for a good-night smoke, chatting quite brilliantly, surprising himself.

Before daylight the next morning, old Pegwell was busy with broom and scraper on his sidewalk, for snow had fallen in the night. The water of the harbour was grey and cruel. Old Pegwell glanced out, shivered, and plied his broom. He was glad he had not to be out there, perhaps stamping around a capstan. It felt good to know that. It made him sing.

*'And awa-ay, Rio! Awa-ay, Rio!  
Then fare you well, my bonny young gal,  
For we're bound for Rio Grande!'*

From down the bay came the hoot of a tug. And, clear and sharp, metallicly shattering the morning heaviness, came also the clack, clack, clack of capstan pawls, the 'fare you well' of an outward bounder.

## • THE SKIPPER AND EL CAPITAN

BY FRANK R. STOCKTON

EARLY one summer morning there sailed into the harbour of *Yakonsk*, a seaport on the far north-western edge of the Pacific Ocean, the three-masted schooner *Molly Crenshaw*, of Gloucester, Mass.

The skipper of this vessel, Ezra Budrack by name, of domestic proclivities had with him his family, consisting of his wife and daughter. The *Molly Crenshaw* was the Budrack home. In this good craft, which Ezra owned, they had sailed to many ports, sometimes on one errand and sometimes on another. They were now entering the harbour of Yakonsk, hoping to do a little trading. They had visited the town before, and the Commandant of the Russian garrison stationed there was glad to see them.

That night, before the moon had set, there steamed into the harbour a Spanish merchant vessel, the *Reina de la Plata*, of about seven hundred tons. She dropped anchor near the entrance to the roadstead, and early the next morning one of her boats started for the shore. In the stern sat Matias Romino, captain of the steamer. As the ship's boat neared the *Molly Crenshaw*, a clear, strong voice rang out from the schooner's deck:

'Hello, el Capitan! I am glad to see you. I made up my mind that was your vessel the moment my eyes fell upon her, before sunrise.'

The captain in the stern of the little boat gave a start. He was a handsome, well-made man, to whom much of his youth remained. His hair was black and his eyes were bright.

'Hello!' he cried, and ordered his crew to make for the schooner.

In a few minutes the two men were shaking hands on the deck of the *Molly Crenshaw*. They were well acquainted, having frequently met at ports where they had been trading, and they liked each other. El Capitan, as Ezra always called him, spoke English with an accent, now scarcely noticed by the Budrack family, and almost the first thing he did was to ask after the skipper's wife and daughter, and hope that they were very well.

'They are all right,' said Ezra, 'and they'll be on deck in no time, when I tell them you're here.'

Drusilla Budrack was a pretty girl and a good one. She had dark eyes, which she owed to her mother, and an embrowned complexion, which had been given her by the sea air. She was very glad to see el Capitan, although she did not say as much about it as her parents did. As for the Spaniard, he was delighted. For more than two years he had been in love with Drusilla. He had been in port with her for weeks at a time, and he had never met a Spanish woman who suited him so well. He longed to follow the example of the good Ezra Budrack, and sail the seas with a wife on board his ship. All these things were known to the Budracks, but nothing definite had been done in the matter.

As the Budracks and el Capitan were talking pleasantly together, relating their experiences since they had last met, they perceived a little gunboat approaching from the town.

'The Commandant treats you better than he treated me,' said the skipper to the Spaniard; 'I had to go in to see him and report my arrival, but he is coming to meet you.'

'Perhaps he will do some fault-finding with me,' replied el Capitan, with a smile, 'because I did not go direct to pay my respects instead of stopping here.'

In a few minutes the gunboat lay to near by, a small boat put out from her, and the Russian Commandant boarded the *Molly Crenshaw*. He was a stout man, with a countenance which was mostly hair, but he had a pleasant smile. He shook hands with el Capitan and the skipper, and bowed to the ladies.

'It astonishes me,' said he to the two captains, 'to see you consort in such a friendly way. Do you not know that your nations are at war?'

The three Budracks and el Capitan started in simultaneous amazement.

'What!' exclaimed the skipper. 'I don't understand you! You said nothing of this to me yesterday.'

'No,' said the Russian; 'I supposed, of course, you knew all about it, and when I was going to refer to the subject I was interrupted.'

'I never heard of it!' cried Ezra. 'It was not known at the port where I last stopped.'

'No!' el Capitan cried, 'I have had no news like this! War! I cannot believe it.'

Then the Commandant drew from his pocket a dispatch he had received from his government, and read it. It was a fair account of the war between the United States and Spain.

The two women began to cry. The skipper walked to and fro across the deck in great agitation.

'It is amazing!' he exclaimed. 'They must have been fighting for a long time. And I knew nothing about it!'

El Capitan stood up, tall, erect, and almost pale. His eyes were fixed upon Drusilla.

'My country at war with the Americans!' he groaned.

'Yes,' said the Commandant; 'and she has been getting the worst of it, too.'

This further information did not affect el Capitan. The fact that his people were fighting Drusilla's people was all the bad news his soul could recognize at that moment.

'You are enemies,' said the Russian, 'and your ships and their officers and crews should be kept apart. It is my duty to keep you apart!'

'We are not enemies!' cried el Capitan. 'No war can make us enemies.'

Mrs. Budrack looked at him with tearful gratitude. By nature she was afraid of all Spaniards, but she had learned to make an exception of el Capitan, and if he continued their friend what could there be to fear? Drusilla's eyes were downcast; she trembled with emotion, and if they had been alone she would have thanked her lover with a shake of the hand.

The skipper was not a sentimental person, and he was not in love with any Spanish woman; he had patriotic principles, and they came to the front.

'You are right, Mr. Commandant,' said he; 'if the United States is at war with Spain, and if the two countries are now fighting as hard as they can, of course el Capitan is my enemy and I am his. There is no other way of looking at it. It is hard lines for me, for I've liked him ever since I first knew him, and my wife and daughter will be very much cut up, I know, but there's no getting around it. He is my enemy and I am his.'

'But what of all that?' cried el Capitan. 'A country does not mean every single person in it. In every nation there is always some one who is different from the rest. I cannot be an enemy to my friends.'

'But you will have to be, el Capitan,' said the skipper. 'You are a good man, and I have a high respect for you, but your country has made you my enemy. You have nothing to say about it, and you can't help it.'

'That is right,' said the Commandant. 'The rulers of your nations have made you enemies. You must submit. If one of you command a man-of-war it would be his duty to capture the other one as a prize. If both ships were war vessels, it would be your duty to fight. Your governments have arranged all that.'

At the mention of fighting Mrs. Budrack went below. She could hear no more. Drusilla, however, remained, silent, pale, with eager eyes.

The skipper knitted his brows and reflected. 'Look here, Mr. Commandant,' he said; 'my vessel is liable to be taken as a prize by the Spanish, is she?'

'By a Spanish war vessel, yes,' was the answer.

'But if there are no war vessels in the case,' said Ezra, 'it seems to me that enemies should fight. If my vessel is liable to be taken as a prize, so is that Spanish vessel. How is that, according to your constitution?'

'My country has no constitution,' said the Commandant; 'her rulers decide according to circumstances.'

'Do you sometimes have to decide according to circumstances?' asked the skipper.

'When I cannot communicate with my government I sometimes have to do so,' answered the Russian.

'Well, then,' said Ezra, 'how do you decide now?'

'I must think,' said the Commandant.

During this conversation el Capitan was silent, but looked very black. To be at war with Drusilla's country—it was a horrible fate.

'I have thought this,' said the Commandant, presently: 'I will have nothing to do with either of you, except to preserve strict neutrality. This is the order of my government. You are enemies, and at any moment you may begin to fight. I have nothing to do with that, but in this harbour you cannot fight. The laws of neutrality will not permit it.'

The countenance of el Capitan began to brighten. Suddenly it beamed. 'I will fight,' he cried. 'I am ready to do battle for the honour of my country. Since there is no war vessel here to uphold her honour, the *Reina de la Plata* will do it. I will sail outside the harbour together with the *Molly Crenshaw*, and I will fight her.'

El Capitan was a good man, but a wily Spaniard; his vessel was larger than the schooner, he carried more men. If he could capture the *Molly Crenshaw* he would capture Drusilla. Then let the war go on; what mattered it to him! He would have her, and everything else could be settled afterwards.

'No,' said the Commandant, 'you cannot sail out of this harbour with this vessel. You are enemies, and the laws of neutrality demand that one of you must remain here for twenty-four hours after the other has departed.'

Drusilla wept, and went below to join her mother. If in this time of war the *Molly Crenshaw* should sail away in one direction and the

*Reina de la Plata* in another, when would she ever see el Capitan again?

The Spaniard approached the skipper and extended his hand. 'I will go outside,' he said, 'and wait there twenty-four hours until you come. Then I will fight you.'

'Very good,' said Ezra, giving his hand a hearty shake; 'you may count on me.'

'I do not think you have a right to fight,' said the Commandant to Ezra, when el Capitan had departed for his steamer. 'You are both merchant-men.'

'But we are each liable to be taken as a prize,' said Ezra, 'and I think that makes it square.'

The Commandant shook his head. 'Even if my country had a constitution,' he said, 'I do not know that it could settle that point. But I shall take no responsibility; all I can do is to preserve strict neutrality.'

The next morning the good schooner *Molly Crenshaw*, with a fine breeze, sailed out of the harbour of Yakonsk, and she had scarcely reached the open sea before she saw, a few miles away, the smoking funnel of the *Reina de la Plata*. The Spanish vessel immediately changed her course and made directly for the *Molly Crenshaw*.

El Capitan was in high spirits. He had had twenty-four hours in which to reflect upon the state of affairs, and to construct a plan of battle, and he was entirely satisfied with the scheme he had worked out. As has been said before, he was so much stronger than his new enemy that he thought there would be very little trouble in capturing her, even if her skipper and her crew should make some show of resistance. His steamer rode much higher out of the water than did the schooner, and if he should lie alongside of the latter, which he could easily do, she, depending entirely upon the wind, while he possessed all the advantages afforded by steam, his men could easily slip down on her deck and quell any disorder which might be occasioned by his action.

Then, as soon as the schooner's company had surrendered and good-fellowship and order had been restored, he would take Skipper Budrack and his family on board his own steamer, where they would have the very best accommodation. He would put a prize crew on the *Molly Crenshaw*, and the two ships would sail away to a Spanish port. On this voyage, which naturally would be somewhat long, he would settle matters with Drusilla and her parents. He had no doubt that he could do so. He believed he knew a good deal concerning the young lady's state of mind, and her



parents would not be in the position to resist his entreaties which they would have occupied had they been sailing in their own vessel, and able, whenever they chose, to put thousands of miles between him and the object of his hopes—of his life.

When he finally arrived at a Spanish port, and if the prize he had captured should be formally adjudicated to him, he would then make the *Molly Crenshaw* a wedding present to Drusilla. He would take command of the schooner, and his parents-in-law should sail with Drusilla and himself, if they so chose, or, if they liked it better, they should spend their declining years in any pleasant spot they might select, receiving regularly a portion of the profits of the voyages which he and Drusilla would make to various ports of the world. His face beaming with happy anticipations, he leaned over the rail as the steamer rapidly approached the schooner, which was now lying to.

Before the two vessels were within hailing distance, Skipper Ezra Budrack displayed a large flag of truce.

'You needn't do that!' roared el Capitan, through his speaking-trumpet. 'I am not going to fight you without notice. I make for you only that I may plan the battle with you.'

Now the two vessels lay, gently rolling, side by side, as near as safety would permit.

'Before we begin,' shouted Ezra to el Capitan, 'I want you to look at this pistol,' and with this he held up a large revolver; 'this is the only shooting-iron on board this vessel, and, as I don't want any accidents or unnecessary bloodshed, I am going to throw it into the sea. Look now! Down she goes!' And with that the skipper hurled the pistol into the water below him with such force that it must have made a hole in the bottom of the sea. 'Now then, el Capitan,' cried he, 'what are you going to do about fire-arms?'

The Spanish captain disappeared, but in a few moments he returned, bearing a large carbine. 'This is the only gun we've got,' said he, 'and down she goes!' With these words he pitched it into the sea.

'That's all right,' said the skipper; 'and now, whenever you're ready to come on, we're ready to meet you. Of course, as you're a steamer, you'll have to do the coming on.'

'I'll do that,' said el Capitan; 'but before we begin, I too, have something to say. I shall subdue your men and capture your ship with as little violence as possible, but still there will be a scuffle, and there may be blows and a good deal of general disorder. That is to be expected, and I do not think either of us can prevent it. Therefore, I beg of you, my dear skipper, that you will keep your wife

and daughter safely shut up in your cabin. I shall tell my men not to go aft if they can help it, and on no account to go below, and as I shall be on board I shall see that my orders are obeyed. Of course I shall allow no injury to come to the two ladies or yourself, but I do not wish that they shall even be frightened. I hope, if it can be so managed, that the whole affair may be transacted so quietly and promptly that it will seem to them like an ordinary nautical manœuvre.

‘His English is wonderfully improved,’ thought Skipper Budrack; ‘when first I knew him he could not express himself like that.’ Then, with a gradually expanding grin, he called out to el Capitan; ‘I am much obliged to you for your kind consideration for my family, but you must not suppose that I would take my wife and daughter on board my vessel when I was going out for a fight. I left Mrs. Budrack and Drusilla in the town. They are staying with the Commandant’s family, who gave them a very kind invitation.’

Now el Capitan stamped his feet and swore many Spanish oaths. Every plan he had made had been swept away as if it had been struck by a typhoon. If he could not capture Drusilla, what would a victory be worth to him? He was mad with rage and disappointment. All the time he had been talking his eyes had been scanning the cabin windows in the hope of seeing a fair face or a waving handkerchief. It was a vile trick the skipper had played on him. He had had such kind thoughts; he had planned to be so magnanimous; he would have taken the schooner so gently that the most tender heart would not have been made to flutter. But now everything was different. He would not say another word to that deceiving skipper. But suddenly an idea came into his fiery brain. ‘I will run down his schooner,’ he exclaimed. ‘I will utterly destroy it. I will sink it to the bottom. But I will be merciful; I will save his life; I will save all their lives if I can. But his vessel will be gone. Then I will take him on board my steamer, and I will keep him here. His wife and daughter must come to him; they cannot be left in Yakonsk, and there is no other ship in which they can get away. On the voyage I will plead my cause; I will make everything all right. I shall have time enough to do that before we reach port. Things will be not so good as they would be otherwise; I shall have no schooner to present to my wife on her wedding day, and I may not be able to do much for Skipper Budrack and his wife, but I will do what I can; they will be my parents-in-law.’

He gave orders that the *Reina de la Plata* should be again put about and headed for the schooner under full steam. He put men in the bow with life-preservers, and two boats, with their crews, were

made ready to be dropped from the davits the moment the two vessels should strike.

On board the *Molly Crenshaw* there was great stir of preparation. The skipper knew that if there was to be a fight at all the steamer must make the attack, and there could be no doubt that her best method of doing so would be to ram her antagonist. Therefore, he had spent the greater part of the preceding day in preparing for that contingency. His men were now placed in suitable positions on the deck, some armed with marline-spikes, some with capstan-bars, and a few with axes.

As the Spanish steamer came rapidly on, some of the men in her bow perceived something on the schooner which they had not noticed before. She appeared to have four masts, although one of them was much shorter than the others. They spoke of the matter to each other, but did not understand it.

Among the preparations the skipper had made for the approaching fight was this apparent fourth mast, which stood about midships, and consisted of a very large and strong spare spar. Its small end had been sharpened and shod with iron, while the other rested in a heavy socket, in which it could be moved at pleasure by means of blocks and tackle.

On came the Spanish steamer, heading directly for the *Molly Crenshaw*, and aiming to strike her about midships. On she came until the bright eyes of el Capitan could be seen shining over the rail. On she came, with the men in the bow ready to throw over their life-preservers, and the men in the boats ready to drop to the water and pull for any unfortunate American sailors who might rise to the surface after their vessel had sunk. On she came until she was within a few hundred feet of the schooner. Then, suddenly, down dropped the big spar into an almost horizontal position; it was pulled a little forward in obedience to a quick command from the skipper, and pointed directly at the steamer's starboard bow.

El Capitan saw his danger and shouted to the steersman—but it was too late; the *Reina de la Plata* could not change her course, but went straight on. As the schooner was so much lower than the steamer, the iron-shod spar struck the latter about half-way between her water-line and her rail. It crashed through her sides and ran for nearly half its length into the vessel.

The force of the concussion was so great that both vessels went dashing through the water for a considerable distance, and if the spar had not held her in position the schooner would have been capsized, even if she had received no other damage. As they moved together they naturally swung toward each other, so that when the motion

had nearly ceased they were lying side by side, the spar having accommodated itself to this change in position by ripping a large hole in the wooden side of the steamer.

Now there was a great yell on board the *Reina de la Plata*, and many heads appeared above her rail.

'Stand by to repel boarders!' shouted the skipper. But before any of his men could gather around him a dozen or more Spaniards were on his deck; they jumped, they slid down ropes, they dropped like cats. Capstan bars and marline-spikes were raised high in the air, but not one of them was brought down upon the heads of the enemy, for the skipper and his men were astonished to see that the Spaniards were unarmed. As soon as they reached the deck of the schooner they took off their caps and, bowing very low, approached the skipper. More Spaniards dropped down from the larger vessel, and some of them, who could speak English, explained why they came.

They were glad to be made prisoners; they did not wish to fight the Americans; all they asked was good and sufficient food and the payment of their wages, which were now a long time in arrears. These things were not to be obtained on the Spanish ship, and they were delighted to have an opportunity to surrender.

When his men had left him, el Capitan, disheartened and with downcast visage, slowly let himself down from the side of his vessel. He was dressed with unusual care, for he had expected to act on this occasion the part of a conquering hero in the presence of his mistress, and had arrayed himself accordingly. In his earlier days he had been an accomplished horseman as well as a seaman, and as a cavalier garb was more picturesque than that of an officer of a merchant vessel, he wore a broad hat with a feather, a bright-coloured sash, and high boots, to which were attached a pair of jingling spurs. He was, perhaps, the only man who had ever fought a marine battle in spurs.

El Capitan stalked toward the skipper. 'I am your prisoner,' he said. 'I am disgraced. I have lost everything. I have no ship; I have nothing. Now I cannot ask you for your daughter.'

'You are right, there,' said the skipper, with a grin; 'this isn't the time nor the place for that sort of thing. But what am I to do with all these fellows of yours? I don't want them on board my schooner.'

'Send them back to my ship,' said el Capitan, in a sombre voice. 'Send me back to join them, if you please. Cut that spar in two with axes, push away from my poor, wounded craft, and set your sails. The force of the concussion has sent everything on board my ship to starboard, and as soon as you loose yourself from her she will list,

she will take in water through that great hole, she will go to the bottom—down to the bottom with me and my men, and that will be the end of us. We will trouble you no more.'

'No, sir,' said the skipper; 'that's not my way of doing business. I have made a prize of your steamer, and I am going to keep her. The hole in her bow can be repaired, and then I shall have a good vessel. I am going to make fast to her bow and stern, and that spar will keep her on an even keel until we get into port and ground or dock her.'

'Have your own way,' gloomily replied el Capitan; 'take her into port, exhibit me as a captive at the tail of your chariot. Nothing matters to me. The best thing I can do is to jump overboard.'

'No, sir!' cried the skipper; 'you are my prisoner. You belong to me. You have no right to jump overboard. If you should do that you would not be honest. After surrender it is cowardly to resign or run away.'

The Spaniard put his hand upon his heart. 'I have nothing left but my honour,' he said; 'you may trust that.'

'Now, el Capitan,' said the skipper, 'you can see for yourself that although your ship is my prize I cannot take her into port. She must take me. My sails are no good for that purpose. Tell your engineers and firemen to go on board and get ready to steam into the harbour. You, with your engine, will tow me along, and I, with my spar, will keep you from capsizing. We will make our vessels fast fore and aft, and then we'll get under headway as soon as possible.'

Side by side, like a pair of nautical Siamese twins, the schooner and the steamer slowly approached the harbour of Yakonsk, but before they were in sight of the town they were met by the little gunboat, with the Commandant on board. They lay to and the Russian boarded the schooner. When the situation was explained to him, he was very much interested.

'I am amazed,' said he to the skipper. 'I did not suppose you could do this. And now what is your next step?'

'I want to take my prize into your port,' said Ezra, 'and have her repaired. Then I'll put a prize crew on board of her, and take her away with me.'

'No, sir,' said the Commandant; 'the laws of neutrality forbid that!'

'But what am I to do?' exclaimed the skipper. 'If I separate from her she will list to starboard and go down, and if a gale comes up while we are fastened together in this fashion we shall both be wrecked.'

'I am very sorry,' said the Commandant, 'but all I have to do is to

observe the laws of neutrality. It is a bad way to capture a vessel, but I cannot help it. The laws of neutrality must be observed. Only one of the vessels can enter the harbour of Yakonsk.'

El Capitan looked down over the side of his vessel, but said nothing. His heart was heavy, and he took but little interest in what might happen next.

The skipper was angry, and vehement in his expressions. He had always disliked war, and had accepted it only when it had been thrust upon him; but at this moment he hated neutrality worse than war, and was willing to accept none of it.

The Commandant stood in deep thought, and brushed his countenance with his hand. 'There is one thing you can do,' he said presently. 'Your two vessels can proceed together as near the mouth of the harbour as the laws of neutrality will allow. Then you can set the steamer's crew to work to shift everything movable to the port side, and when you have cut away your spar I think she will be able to steam up to the town, as the sea is tolerably smooth. Then I can set all the ship-carpenters in Yakonsk to work on her. There are a good many of them, you know, for building small vessels is the main industry of our place. And you, Mr. Skipper, can cruise out here until she is repaired, after which she will leave and you can come in and join your wife and daughter.'

'And how long will it take to make the repairs?' impatiently asked the skipper.

'I will put the carpenters on her as close together as they can work, inside and out, and, from what I can judge of the damage, I think they can have her ready to sail in a week.'

The skipper grumbled savagely, and wished he had not captured the Spaniard, but he made up his mind that he would have to be satisfied with things as they were, and he determined, if he must cruise for a week, to sail for Petrimetkoff, and try to do a little business there. This would occupy just about a week.

The two vessels moved on towards the harbour's mouth, the great spar was cut in twain, the *Reina de la Plata* steamed slowly toward the town, and the *Molly Crenshaw* set sail for Petrimetkoff.

It was nine days and twelve hours later when Ezra Budrack's three-masted schooner arrived at the port of Yakonsk. The skipper was very late; he had been detained by unfavourable winds and the exigencies of trade; but, dark as was the night, he entered the harbour, dropped anchor, and waited for daylight. Then he went ashore, and knocked at the door of the Commandant before any of the family was up. It was not long before that high official opened the door himself, still wearing his nightcap.

'I may be a little early,' said the skipper, 'but you must excuse me. You know a man who has not seen his wife and daughter for nearly ten days, and at a time when everything is in such an upset condition, is naturally anxious. Can I go to Mrs. Budrack?'

'Your wife and daughter!' cried the Commandant. 'They are not here! They sailed away in the Spanish vessel yesterday afternoon. They were so anxious about you, when you did not return at the time you fixed, that they determined to go to Petrimetkoff and join you. If you had left there they were sure they would meet you on the way.'

'Did my wife and daughter hatch up that plan?' shouted the skipper. 'I don't believe a word of it! It was that wretched el Capitan! It is a scheme worthy of a crafty Spaniard! He wanted to have them on board with him! That is all he cared about! He persuaded them to go; I am as sure of it as if I had been here and heard every word that was said! But I can wait no longer. I must put on every stitch of sail I can carry and go after them. When they find I am not at Petrimetkoff I don't know where he will take them.'

'No, sir!' said the Commandant; 'you cannot leave this port until twenty-four hours after they sailed. The laws of neutrality demand that you remain in the harbour until five o'clock this afternoon, and as that's the case you might as well come in and take breakfast with us.'

The skipper expostulated violently, but it was of no use, and he went into the house and took breakfast.

At about noon, the Commandant and the skipper were standing on the pier of the town, when they saw in the offing the smoke of a steamer. In a few minutes they descried the *Reina de la Plata* coming in under full steam. The Commandant gave a great shout.

'The unprincipled Spaniard!' he cried. 'He knows he has no right to enter this harbour until he is sure your vessel is not here. I must go and stop him. He must go back and lie outside until the laws of neutrality permit you to go out to him.'

What the skipper then said concerning the laws of neutrality need not be recorded here, but the air quivered with the intensity of his ejaculations. 'Make him go back!' he cried. 'Do you suppose I am going to let that Spaniard steam away again with my wife and daughter? I shall row out to her, and you can do what you please with your gunboat.' Then he shouted for his men, but only one of them was in his boat, which lay at the pier. The others were up in the town.

The Commandant ran to his gunboat, but steam was not up in that little vessel. He gave his orders and hurried back to the pier to

prevent the skipper from holding communication with the Spanish vessel.

'What do you mean?' shouted the angry Ezra, when he saw three soldiers arrive on the pier. 'That's my vessel—my property. She's no Spaniard now. And she has my wife and daughter on board.'

'It is my duty,' said the Commandant, 'and I can't help it.'

'Duty!' exclaimed the skipper. 'If you are so particular about duty, why did you allow her to lie here for a week to be repaired? Do you call that neutrality?'

'I don't call that anything,' said the Commandant, 'I know of no decree issued by my government which would prevent my giving work to the ship-carpenters of this town. As soon as steam is up on my gunboat I shall go out and make that Spaniard turn back. Confound him!' he continued, 'he is coming too far, and he is about to drop anchor.'

'Yes!' exclaimed the skipper, 'and they are making ready to lower a boat. Perhaps my wife and daughter will come ashore!'

'They shall not do it,' roared the Commandant. 'There shall be no communication. O that my gunboat were under steam! I would sink that little boat. It is making directly for the pier.'

'You'd better not try that,' cried the skipper. 'That would be a worse breach of neutrality than anything that has been mentioned yet. But mind you, Mr. Commandant, that steamer does not leave this port until I get my wife and daughter. If I can't hinder it any other way I'll sink my schooner across the mouth of the harbour.'

The Commandant paid very little attention to those words. The boat from the *Reina de la Plata* was approaching rapidly. El Capitan sat in the stern, and as he came nearer it was seen that his face was beaming.

'Keep off!' shouted the Commandant. 'Don't try to land here, or——'

El Capitan may have been deaf with excitement, but, whether this was the case or not, he was standing on the pier in less than a minute after the Commandant had shouted to him.

'This is intolerable,' said the Russian, advancing. 'The laws of neutrality forbid communication——'

'Down with the laws of neutrality!' shouted el Capitan. 'I trample them under my feet! I have nothing to do with them!'

The countenance of the Commandant bristled with rage. 'Nothing to do with the laws of neutrality?' he yelled. 'I will show you——'

'Ha!' cried el Capitan. 'You cannot show me anything. To be neutral there must be enemies; to enforce neutrality there must be war. There is no war, therefore there is no neutrality. Peace has been



proclaimed between the Spaniards and the Americans. I have the news. I got this Russian newspaper from a steamer I spoke, bound for Petrimetkoff, and I immediately put back here at full speed, Mr. Budrack, because I wanted the Commandant to know everything in case you should arrive without my sighting you, which you did.

During this speech the skipper stood amazed. The war ended! Peace! What complications did this news bring with it! He wanted to row out to his wife and daughter, but he must wait and find out how matters stood. The Commandant had been reading an account of the peace protocol, and he now translated it into English for the skipper.

'Well?' said the Commandant, looking at el Capitan.

'It is well,' said the Spaniard, 'very well. There is no war; I am no longer a prisoner. There is no war, and my ship is no longer a prize.'

'Stop there!' shouted the skipper. 'I don't agree to that.'

'But you must agree,' said el Capitan. 'Your prize has not been adjudicated to you, and I am sure no court would give it to you now.'

'He is right,' said the Commandant. 'I am afraid he is right. But tell me this,' said he, addressing the skipper; 'if that ship is not your prize, who is going to pay the ship-carpenters for her repairs?'

It was el Capitan who made answer. 'I do not know,' he said, shaking his head; 'but one thing is certain; I ordered no repairs.'

'And I would not have had them made if you had ordered them,' said the Commandant. 'I do not believe you have any money. I set those carpenters to work because you ordered it, Mr. Budrack.'

'But if it is not my prize,' said the skipper, 'what had I to do with it, then, and what have I to do with it now?'

'Gentlemen,' said el Capitan, 'do not let us dispute about who shall pay those wretched carpenters. Do not let us give them a thought when there are so many joyful things to talk about. It is right that you should know, sir,' he said, turning to the skipper, 'because you are her father. And you, sir,' to the Commandant, 'because you are the chief official of the place, and there may be constitutional laws which would compel you to make some kind of a legal entry.'

'We have no constitution, as I told you,' said the Commandant; 'but we have laws which compel the payment of mechanics.'

'What are you talking about?' cried Ezra to el Capitan.

'It is this,' answered the Spaniard. 'When I took your wife and daughter on board the *Reina de la Plata* I considered their wishes as commands. I was a prisoner; I belonged to the husband of the one and the father of the other. The steamer was his property—I remembered my position. I said no word to them of what was in my heart.'

But this morning when I heard that I was free, that I stood on the deck of a vessel of which I was commander, then all was changed. I had a right to say what I pleased, and I told your daughter that I loved her. I will not speak of the details, but she accepted me, and my soul immediately floated as bravely as that proud flag of Spain you see upon my vessel.'

'And her mother?' inquired the skipper. 'What did she do?'

'She shed tears,' replied el Capitan, 'but I am sure they were tears of joy. She said she did not believe you would allow your daughter, sir, to wed an enemy, but she was sure you would not object to an alliance with the subject of a friendly power.'

The skipper made no further remark, but got into his boat and was rowed to the steamer.

El Capitan, being a man of discretion, did not go to the vessel until half an hour later. The skipper met him at the rail.

'I have settled the whole matter,' said Ezra. 'I expected you to marry my daughter because my wife had made up her mind that it should be so. If your ship had been my prize I had intended to sell the *Molly Crenshaw*, and we would all have sailed on the *Reina*, because, in these days, a steamer is better for trading than any three-masted schooner, no matter how good she may be. Things are changed, but I shall still carry out my plan. I shall sell my schooner, and buy the steamer, if your owners will act reasonably about it. And then, of course, I will pay for the repairs, and I suppose I must settle the back wages of the sailors, if I expect to keep them.'

That evening the three Budracks and el Capitan dined with the Commandant and his family. They spent a pleasant evening, and when they had returned to their schooner the skipper and his wife sat up for a while in their little cabin, to talk over matters and things.

'This has turned out very well for Drusilla and el Capitan,' said Mrs. Budrack, 'but if we sell the *Molly Crenshaw* we shall lose a very pleasant home.'

'Yes,' said Ezra. 'I don't suppose that Spanish steamer can be made to take her place as far as our comfort goes.'

'And it may end,' she continued, 'in our buying a house on shore, somewhere, and living there. I don't believe el Capitan will be wanting us to be sailing about with him all the time.'

'No,' said Ezra, 'and I don't believe we would like it, either.'

'The Commandant was in a very good humour to-night,' remarked Mrs. Budrack. 'He seemed to think it a fine thing for the town that his ship-carpenters had such a good job.'

'Oh, yes,' said Ezra, 'I don't wonder he was pleased; but if I had

known I should have to pay for that hole I made in that Spanish vessel, I would not have punched it.'

'And listen to those sailors,' said Mrs. Budrack, 'over there on the steamer. They are all singing. I expect it's the thought that they are going to get their back-wages that makes them so happy.'

'Yes,' said Ezra, somewhat dolefully, 'and from what el Capitan told me this evening, some of their wages must be a long time in arrears. It will be a pretty heavy drain on me, but as that's going to be my ship, and as el Capitan is going to be my son-in-law, I suppose I've got to pay them, and make things square for him and Drusilla.'

Mrs. Budrack reflected for a moment. 'Now, Ezra,' said she, 'let me tell you something. The next time you get mixed up in a war I'd advise you to get on the side that's beaten, or else on the side that's bound to preserve the laws of neutrality. It doesn't pay to conquer.'

## PERILS FOR TRIAL

BY JAMES HARPER

'It has . . . perils for trial, or even for an ending, and calms for the good emblem of death. The sea is the matrix of creation, and we have the memory of it in our blood.'—HILAIRE BELLOC.

ON a July morning in 1944 all hands aboard the aged Glasgow steamer *Frampton* were awake before daybreak . . . standing by . . . waiting. . . . The enemy usually struck at dawn or dusk.

The master and first mate were sipping at mugs of hot tea as they peered over the canvas dodger of the navigating bridge, scanning the sea for the tell-tale wash of a moving periscope or the dim outline of a surfaced U-boat. Aft on the poop several figures could be faintly seen closed up at the four-inch gun. Wearing bulky life-jackets under loose, hooded duffel coats, they had the appearance of corpulent and unholy monks. Other indistinct shapes hovered round a pair of sleek Oerlikon machine-guns on the boat-deck. And up on the fore-topmast the dark head of a look-out showed above the weather-cloth of the crow's-nest. For one thousand eight hundred dawns now they had kept vigil.

Twelve days before, the *Frampton* had sailed from New York, in convoy, for Sierra Leone. But two thousand miles of steaming had revealed a flaw in her senile machinery and, on the ninth day, she had been compelled to drop out. With dismay her crew had watched the neat columns of pearl-grey ships slowly melt away between sea and sky, leaving them motionless, alone and vulnerable.

The old chief engineer, small, bespectacled, had been most indignant when reporting the failure of his air-pump to the captain. 'I warned you before leaving New York,' he reminded the big, mild Cornishman. 'I told you this convoy speed was five revs. more than she's fit for—and it was asking for trouble putting her in it.' For twenty-five years, off and on, in various of the company's vessels, the chief had been warning the captain about one thing or another: they were great friends.

After twenty hours of ceaseless slogging, during which time the dead ship echoed to the blows of heavy hammers, the chief and his

staff had got her under way again. The deck department had maintained a respectful silence while work progressed down in that complicated underworld where Vulcan, the god of fire and metal, held sway. They knew nothing of air-pump rods and bucket valves, except that they were somehow mixed up with that major catastrophe called 'losing the vacuum'—but they were extremely glad to be steaming again, no longer a sitting duck.

The recognisable features of sea and sky gradually emerged as the curtain of night thinned away. The horizon grew visible all round; the perimeter of a familiar circle of ocean that moved ever onward with the ship and of which she was the geometric centre. Amid streaks of pale green and saffron in the eastern sky, the sun appeared, to begin the morning's steep climb to the meridian; and, at a sign from the bridge, the hooded gunners stood down and hurried off to the galley, lured by the delicious aroma of frying bacon and eggs. Thumping anxiously on at her full nine knots the *Frampton* entered upon the third day of her solitude. All day she steered east, over a lightly corrugated sea, heading into the warm airstream of the trade wind. Overhead a patch of faint blue marked the zenith; but elsewhere a thin, sulphur-coloured veil draped the sky. Upon the dark water a flashing band of copper stretched away towards a burnished copper sun.

In the ship the tension of the morning slackened as the heat and routine of the day combined to lull her crew into apathy. Down in the dimly lit stokehold nine roaring furnaces converted coal into power, and at the end of each four-hour stretch the panting African Kroo-boys thankfully surrendered shovel and slice to the watch taking over. Out on the exposed foredeck two old sailors laboured, heads together, over a splice in a heavy mooring wire. Driving the steel marline-spike through the unyielding lay of the rope and hauling taut the springing strands was gruelling toil for such a day, and their thick grey shirts were dark with sweat. Nearby some young fellows, stripped to the waist and glistening, worked listlessly at the less expert job of 'souji-ing' paintwork.

Throughout the day a vertical sun beat down upon the steel ship and by nightfall her interior was an oven. Hours after sunset her cabins were still too hot for sleeping. On boat-deck, poop and fore-castle those of her crew off duty lolled, luxuriously naked, under a sky now blessedly dark and star-flecked after the stifling sulphur dome of day. Up in the 'eyes' of the ship, in the angle of the bows, Paddy Dougan, the elderly able seaman on look-out from eleven till midnight, stared into the night and softly lilted a 'come-all-ye' of his own land. Of the ship's half-dozen naval ratings only one now stood

watch by the main armament. The captain and third mate conversed in low tones on the bridge and the helmsman, looking Oriental in the faint green light of the binnacle, held her easily on her course.

And as the *Frampton* settled into her night's routine, the U-boat surfaced in a smother of phosphorescent foam, well beyond range of the ship's lookouts. She closed in with the easy confidence of a redskin stalking a solitary covered wagon until, at ten minutes to midnight, her commander had the merchantman helplessly ensnared in the cross-wires of his sights. He did not fire the torpedo until a hit was certain in her most vital spot, the engine-room. With equal confidence his gunners drew a bead upon the wireless cabin on the bridge.

The story of an 'action' between an ordinary merchant vessel and a submarine can never be given heroic treatment as can, for instance, the story of the stout ship against the storm. The wretched business is always too one-sided. In a well-conducted convoy, with a strong naval escort and a good 'air umbrella', the merchantman has a chance—but only then. As the war dragged on, merchant gun crews became obsessed by a sense of maddening frustration. All the fond polishing of twelve-pounders and four-point-sevens, all the drills and firing practices, were of no avail against the subtle, lightning thrust of the U-boat. In a sinking ship, on a dark night, there is little chance of 'shooting it out' with an unseen killer.

The concussion sent the master of the *Frampton* sprawling on the scrubbed pinewood planking of his bridge. Although he could not have lain there for more than ten seconds, in that brief space he witnessed an amazing spectacle. He saw the young third mate rush into the armour-protected wheelhouse to sound the signal for boat stations. Then, for perhaps the fifth of a second, his brain was numbed by a fierce shriek, very close to his ear, followed by another explosion. And, when he looked again, wheelhouse, chartroom and wireless cabin were unbelievably disintegrating in a slow landslide of crumbling plastic slabs and twisted stanchions. His searching hands found the smooth brass column of the engine-room telegraph. Clumsily he hauled himself to his feet and pulled the dial handles round to 'Finished with Engines'.

The ship was already developing a starboard list; but he could not yet leave the bridge to learn what damage had been done by the torpedo. If things were hopeless down below the chief engineer would, doubtless, soon appear to acquaint him with the hard facts. And the first and second mates could be trusted to get the boats ready. Meanwhile he had to find out what had happened to the

third mate and the helmsman in the wrecked wheelhouse, and to 'Sparks' in the wireless-room. The lights had gone out now, but in the telescope box he found the electric torch that was always kept there for just such an emergency.

Inside the steel house the chaos revealed by the torch-beam was obviously the result of blast at close quarters. Through the acrid smoke he could see that the stout wooden partitions which divided it into steering, navigating and wireless compartments had been transformed into a tottering, crazy trellis of splintered mahogany. Looking quite calm, as if asleep, phones faithfully on ears, the senior wireless operator rested his head gently on the official Marconi log-pad on the desk; and in his right hand he clutched a Marconi indelible pencil. Beyond the jagged barrier a sailor hung heavily over the wheel. His left hand was braced, as if to steady him, against the brass helmet of the steering compass. The third mate had sunk to the deck, close to the alarm button which, little more than a minute ago, he had pressed. A good-looking lad with his bronzed skin and fair, wavy hair. Now his legs were twisted awkwardly, and there was a trickle of blood from his mouth.

Frenzied cries, and other more controlled shouts of warning, reached the captain as he groped his way out of the doomed house. The excitement seemed to be centred on the motor lifeboat. He shone the torch and saw that some of the crew were lowering away on the falls while the ship still carried far too much headway, the engines having come to rest only a minute ago. For all his sixty-five years he cleared the bridge ladder in a leap and dashed for that precious motor-boat. 'Hold on, there, you damned fools,' he roared. 'You'll lose that boat and everyone in her.' But he was too late. Panic had seized a few of the men and orders no longer had any meaning.

As the boat's gunwale dropped below deck level he could see about half-a-dozen men in her. Sitting bolt upright in the stern, stiff with fear, a fat negro fireman blinked up at him solemnly with rolling white eyes. In a last effort to save the boat he tried to grab the after fall from the hands of some figure he could not identify. But, as they struggled, someone at the forward fall lost control altogether and the bows plunged sharply downward, spilling the screaming occupants into the sea. Unable to cope with so confusing a situation, his adversary suddenly let go too, and with a loud whirring of manilla rope through hardwood sheaves, a perfectly good motor-boat disappeared into the night. Those men who had been lost overside with the boat, even if uninjured, could not possibly get hold of her in the dark. And by daylight they would

have drifted too far apart. Their stout kapok life-jackets would keep them afloat for a long time—too long a time to live without hope.

What with the excitement of the last five minutes and that wrestling bout, the captain was feeling his age as he hurried across to number four boat. But she was still safe against her griping-spar. The second mate and a group of men were stowing her with extra food and blankets. And through the darkness the bosun's great voice reached him from the lower bridge. That dependable fellow was using his best adjectives to get one of the smaller boats away.

Meanwhile a very hurried inspection was enough to show the chief engineer and the first mate that nothing could be done to save the ship. She was now listed to twenty degrees and, having lost her headway, rolled sluggishly to the low beam swell. The captain joined them at the head of the narrow iron ladder that led down to the bottom of the stokehold. Already there were many hundreds of tons of sea-water down there. They watched it pouring through from the engine-room where the torpedo had torn a great gash in her side. Each time she rolled it cascaded down the incline with a thunderous roar. All three trained their torches on the scene. The starboard boiler was already dead, its fires submerged; and there was a great hissing and spluttering as water lapped the others, still alive. The bodies of the two Kroo firemen, who had been on duty when she was hit, floated face down. At regular intervals the dark, swirling water lifted them up and hurled them with crazy force against the shell-plating. 'The fourth engineer and the donkeyman were killed in the engine-room,' said the chief quietly.

The mate shifted the beam of his torch to the massive steel bulkhead that divided the engine and boiler-rooms from number two hold. 'The carpenter has gone to sound the bilges, sir,' he said, 'but all those lower seams have been started and it looks pretty hopeless.' The captain sighed heavily for the ship he had commanded, and loved, for ten years. Loaded deep with almost a million pounds' worth of war supplies, her big engine-room and stoke-hold and her largest cargo compartment were now laid open to the sea. And that insidious sea was rapidly eating into her buoyancy. 'All right, gentlemen, we'll abandon her,' he said.

An hour after the boats were away the *Frampton* gave up the unequal struggle and the waters closed over her. Quite slowly she would make the long descent, through three thousand fathoms, to the ocean floor. From the known, and unfear'd, world of wind and wave she would penetrate to unutterably alien depths where the soft mud would stir, for the first time in a million years, to receive



her. Her sealed double-bottom tanks, into which the water could not pour, would soon collapse under the terrific hydrostatic pressure. But the ship in general would retain her form. Her cabins and corridors would become the haunt of grotesque cannibal creatures with mouths disproportionately huge, teeth pitilessly functional. In that dark and motionless abyss such homely and loved things as a banjo, a briar pipe, the silver-framed portrait of a Cornish lady, would settle slowly, with terrible finality, into the primordial ooze.

Her men too, when they left her, crossed a forbidding frontier. That controlled, but ever latent, dread of wind and water, which is the true basis of seamanship, was suddenly liberated when they forsook the great steel ship for the open boats. Fearfully they entered upon a new physical intimacy with the sea. A gale, which before had meant merely discomfort, could now mean disaster. Steep-piled waves, viewed strangely from the shadowy canyons of their troughs, would be dark, green mountains. If one such mountain were suddenly to crumble and collapse upon them, that would be the end. The war began to assume Toytown proportions. Little guns might go pop and little tin submarines go scurrying about—but thirty-five cubic feet of sea-water would always weigh a ton.

Their first sunrise in this unfamiliar element was a hopeful one. It was a morning of highlights and lively patterns. Water burst from the bows of the dancing boats and fanned away in complicated designs of bright lace-work. The pale gold sun climbed the sky behind a grille of dark cloud-bands. The steady north-east trade was sweeping the sea into long, low ridges which undulated gently athwart the wind; and the little waves were bright as molten lead along their crests. But an even greater brightness lay upon the horizon, vertically under the sun: there the sea was a great blinding splash of platinum.

The captain's boat, lying to her canvas sea-anchor, rose and fell rhythmically. Within that thin wooden shell, figures that had lain cramped and still through the dark hours now stirred into primitive awareness of the sun's warmth. With exaggerated gestures and much shouting they sought to span the mile of flashing, metallic sea that separated them from their shipmates in the other boat. But only for that first day were the two together. Next morning the other had dipped out of view. They knew only that she lay out there somewhere, below the edge of the convex disc of water.

She was never seen or heard of again. She 'went missing with all hands', as the marine casualty reports would say. How she foundered, or when, will never be known. True, she was a little smaller than the others, but not enough really to matter. She was as well

stocked with food and water, and her gear was in as good condition. But in one essential she was at a disadvantage. The first mate, young himself, was not so well served as the captain in his crew. It just so happened that there was too much youth in that boat—youth lacking that endless patience and humility which the sea demands.

Meanwhile, in the captain's boat, what was to prove a voyage of terror began auspiciously. On that very first day the second mate succeeded, almost casually, in tipping the scale in favour of man against the sea. In the excitement of abandoning ship, when all others had thought only of possessions and cigarettes, he had coolly salvaged the precious tools of his trade, carefully descending the swaying ladder with his instruments slung round his neck. Now his sextant lay, undamaged, on the side-bench; and beside it a beautiful miniature chronometer, mounted in brass gimbals in a mahogany case. From a canvas gas-mask holder he produced pencils, paper, a nautical almanac and a complete set of navigation tables. He grinned wryly at his commander. 'If you can sail this God-forsaken scow, captain, I'll navigate her,' he said.

This dark, silent Welshman was typical of the better class of tramp steamer second mate. Experienced, efficient, not too fond of the bottle: a lonely great-circle navigator. Although holding a master's certificate he was inclined to drift from ship to ship with little thought of promotion. The nature of his job made him something of a recluse. Apart from routine navigating duties he had charge of the bridge from midnight till four in the morning, when all sensible folk were asleep; and during the quiet afternoons while they enjoyed a siesta. Yet on long sea passages he was in his element. For weeks on end he would be as absorbed as any cloistered scholar, and as quiet, carefully filling the pages of his sight-book with mysterious logarithmic and trigonometrical ciphers. His delight, and reward, after a long crossing of the empty ocean would be a good landfall of Guardafui or Cape Leeuwin or Java Head. His was a world of charts and almanacs, sextant and chronometer, sun and stars. Apart from the sailors in his own watch he had little contact with the rest of the crew; and after a twelve-months' voyage still might not know their names.

On the linen-backed boat chart of the Atlantic the captain made a mark where his ship had gone down—latitude fourteen degrees north, longitude twenty-nine west. As he and the second mate inspected that position the real seriousness of their predicament was revealed to them. Their sturdy resolution to sail the boat to safety was being laughed at by a cruel and tantalising ocean. Only two hundred and seventy miles away, bearing east by north, lay the

island of San Filippe Fogo of the Cape Verde group. But between the pencilled cross and that happy isle stood the impenetrable barrier of the north-east trade wind; and the strong westward flow of the equatorial current.

The wave of hope among his men, when they learned that land was so near, tricked the captain into a decision which he knew in his heart to be foolish. He was perfectly aware that a ship's boat, built solely to float and with no sailing qualities, could never work to windward well enough to reach Fogo. But the temptation to try to claw towards the island, however slowly, was great; the prospect of turning away into two thousand miles of lonely ocean appalling. He decided to try it for a day or so and see how she shaped.

They held on grimly, tack and tack, for three days, against a rising sea and a breeze steady and fresh from the hated north-east. At sunrise on the third morning the captain knew that he must end this folly. Not far away beyond the horizon, right in the blade of the sun and dead to windward, lay the island, a fascinating and fatal Hy Brazil. But they were no nearer to it than they had been at the beginning. And, under the spell of it, precious food and water were draining away during useless days of false hope.

The men heard him in silence. This was the most awful moment of all their lives. He took the tiller and brought the heaving boat slowly round before the wind. His face expressionless, he pointed her west towards the Antilles, two thousand miles away. The jib and lug sheets were slacked; the red sails bellied and the boat leapt to life, leaving a bubbling wake behind her. But the road to the west would be too long, too arduous, however well she might sail.

At this heart-breaking manoeuvre the first shadow of discord fell upon the company. The primitive urge to survive had already set in motion the mechanism of selection. Each man, of this hitherto uninhibited band of shipmates, was being drawn towards his own kind and away from the others. On this long road some were to find, to their surprise, that they had in them the stuff of courage. Others were to give way to despair and, in the end, to madness.

For ten days the boat made good westing; eighty miles a day according to the second mate's sights. That meant that eight hundred miles lay astern, with twelve hundred still ahead. During that time some good work was done in the boat. And fervent thanks were offered to those unknown Board of Trade officials who had so wisely decided on the equipment a British ship's lifeboat must carry. Of first importance was the rain-catcher, a sort of inverted tent of white cotton with a long spout that fitted into the

filling cap of the water-tanks. The chief engineer took over this responsibility and, after a few brief showers, the tanks and breakers were brimming full again.

Then two able seamen found needles, palms and twine in the repair bag, and declared that they could turn the canvas boat-cover into a spinnaker. These were two fine men, both in their early thirties and thorough sailors. One, Gillis, came from Stornaway; the other, Sinclair, was a Shetlander. While they cut and stitched at their epic wind-catcher, Otsing, the dour little Estonian carpenter, made a fine boom for it from a broken oar.

The setting of the sail was a big occasion; and the designers grinned broadly when it filled and drew beautifully, giving the boat a great lift along. The irrepressible Dougan, delighted with the rig, struck a dramatic pose and declaimed fervently:—

*'Tis my grief that Patrick Laughlin is not Earl of Irrul still,  
And that Brian Duff no longer rules as Lord upon the hill:  
And that Colonel Hugh McGrady should be lying dead and low,  
And I sailing, sailing swiftly from the county of Mayo.*

'Put a sock in it, Hamlet,' called the third engineer from the bottom boards where he was busy at the endless task of bailing. He was a Tynesier, a 'Geordie', cheerful and tough.

'Hamlet is it, ye unfortunate yahoo?' cried Dougan with mock ferocity. 'Ach, but who could expect the ignorant English to know of the fine gentlemen and great scholars of Ireland?'

'If you're a great scholar I'm Hedy Lamarr,' countered the third.

There was an indignant roar from Paddy: 'Read your history book and ye'll see-'twas Irish teachers crossed the water to civilise yez, and you runnin' about painted blue and half naked.'

But the third had the last word: 'The Irish must have slipped back a hell of a lot since then, if you're an example,' he laughed.

There was plenty of good spirit among these fellows: plenty of the strength that would survive if survival were possible. Also of their number were the cook, a perky Cockney; one of the three surviving negro firemen; and the senior naval gunner, a quiet, capable chap.

The days of fine sailing helped to dim the bitter memory of the illusive island; and most of the company were cheerful enough despite painful sunburn and scant rations. Every evening the captain doled out the single milk tablet and the pitifully small piece of biscuit, chocolate and pemmican which each man accepted without complaint. But, thanks to the rain-catcher, everyone still had a full

cup of water a day. The captain remarked frequently to his confidants, the chief engineer and the second mate, that they had every reason to be pleased with the behaviour of the men.

Morale was sound enough, because what may be called the 'balance of power' was decidedly with the enthusiasts. Of fourteen castaway souls only three were, at that time, utterly lost. Two were Kroo natives who, from the first, had been physically and mentally benumbed. They neither listened with the others to the captain's hopeful talk, nor lifted a hand to help with the work. Even food brought no light to those haunted brown eyes that stared always to the horizon at whatever phantoms their tortured imaginations had evoked.

The third man, however, though equally disinterested, was not passive. He had always a sneering word with which to deflate every buoyant remark. This big, heavily built fellow, who for several months had been the loudest-mouthed, and most impatient of discipline, of all the *Frampton's* crew, had actually less sea experience than the youngest cabin boy. Little more than a year before, the flux of war had lifted him out of a Midland factory and set him afloat, and very much at sea, as an engine-room greaser. He had always been a trouble-maker and now the after-guard in secret conference, declared him capable of physical violence. As the voyage lengthened and tension increased, the captain was often to remember the small automatic pistol in his pocket. For thirty years he had carried a firearm of some sort, generally locked away in the ship's safe, but had never fired a single shot in all that time.

On the fourteenth day good fortune deserted them. The trades fell away to a feather-weight air and the sea levelled out into a smooth, eye-torturing mirror. The cumulus cloud, characteristic of the region, dispersed, leaving the boat exposed to the fierce, vertical sun. And with the cloud went their hopes of rain. As the pangs of hunger and thirst increased, each man could feel his strength beginning to ebb. And most were in great pain from hands lacerated by salt-soaked cordage and burned raw by the sun. In searing heat, which blistered paintwork and split the top strakes of planking, the water ration had to be cut by half. There was now neither movement to delight the eye nor sound to please the ear. The strum of the wind in the rigging and the swish of the bow wave had ceased. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the silent boat ghosted on, leaving not a ripple on the shot-silk water.

How small and empty was their world now! The radius of vision from a low-lying boat to the skyline is, after all, a mere two and a half miles. Boundless horizons are only in the imagination.

Nothing, not a bird, nor a fragment of cloud, nor a strand of weed, appeared to relieve the terrible monotony of this enchanted circle. The men grew listless. When first taking to the boats they had thought of wind and wave as their only possible destroyers. Now, heightened imagination began to see in this diabolical perversity of the ocean a symbol of the inertia of death. The end might come like this; adrift and helpless upon an untroubled sea. Men who had dreaded the gale now cursed the deadly gentleness of the breeze.

Several times a day the second mate, his face distorted like an idiot's against the glare, caught the bright sun in the mirrors of his sextant and read its hopeless message. The average day's run was now only about twenty-five miles; and he was certain that at least ten of that was current. He shrank from calculating the number of days needed to make the land at this rate. Once he whispered to the chief engineer: 'I hope you've got your calipers and micrometer handy.'

'How do you mean?' asked the chief innocently.

'I mean that one of these fine days we're going to need a good engineer who can divide a milk tablet into about ten equal parts.'

'Now, now, mister,' broke in the captain, 'we'll have no more of that. What would the men think if they could hear such talk?'

'Sorry, sir,' murmured the second mate. Endlessly watching the boat's madden~~ing~~ crawl across the chart was getting on his nerves.

And the apparently placid confidence of the second mate's daily routine was getting on the big greaser's nerves. He had always disliked this particular officer, mainly for his terse way of giving orders at lifeboat and fire drills or during gunnery practices. So unwilling and unfit a member of the craft could not be expected to appreciate the ascetic second mate's stern concept of seafaring. But of one thing he was certain: physically he was the officer's superior, and could easily break the upstart's jaw if need be.

One day the captain was explaining why the fair wind must inevitably return: 'There is a tropical storm breeding somewhere. Even if it were five hundred miles from here it would cause a temporary lull in the trades. As a matter of fact, that's the only thing in the world that could influence them. But it definitely can't last long.'

'A fat lot you know about it, you bloody old fool,' interrupted the greaser.

'I advise you to be careful with your tongue,' snapped the captain. There was little point in telling this numskull that while the equator remains hotter than the poles, while the earth continues to rotate, planetary trade winds must blow.

'Don't make me laugh,' the greaser sneered. 'We haven't a dog's chance of reaching land and your Cheerful-Charlie stuff isn't kidding me.'

The captain said nothing, but stared at him for rather a long time in a way the second mate thought very odd.

'I hope the old man isn't beginning to crack up,' he whispered to his friend the chief engineer.

'If you knew the skipper as well as I do,' said the chief, 'you would know he isn't. But the big fellow is.'

For several days Gillis and Sinclair had been streaming the fishing-tackle. Without success they had tried every trick learned in their young days among their own northern islands. But, on the same day that the big greaser showed his hand, a solitary flying-fish ended its last eager leap in the stern-sheets—a sign at last that there was life in the deep. Immediately half-a-dozen men had the same thought. 'After dark we can light the lantern,' said Gillis, 'and they'll go for that.'

'We'll get thousands of them!' Dougan exclaimed.

'Come on, Doc,' called the gunner to the cook. 'Show a leg and get cracking with the chips.'

Never was lantern more carefully trimmed and polished. It was hung that night in the mainsail, and the tiny fish did go for it. Everyone listened eagerly, counting each light tap-tap as the little bodies struck the canvas and fell to the bottom boards. The first night's haul was thirty-seven and, although eaten raw, they were delicious. Every night after that they caught enough to take the sharp edge off their hunger. If only the rain would come and they could have a long drink of water to wash down the salty meal!

But the fair wind did not come again before life in the boat had descended to the plane of nightmare. For some time the smaller of the two entranced negroes, a wizened creature of uncertain age, had been secretly drinking salt water. At first he would lean over the gunwale, trail his skinny black hand in the sea and watch, fascinated, as the cool, sparkling drops fell from his finger-tips. Then he began touching his swollen lips with the wet fingers. At last one dark night, while everyone else dozed, he stealthily manœuvred himself close to the one remaining tank of drinking-water. Very slowly he unscrewed the brass cap and began lowering the enamel dipper through the hole.

The faint tinkling of metal against metal woke the man nearest to the tank, the third engineer. Close to the third's hand lay the boat axe. In an instant he had clutched it and, with a loud cry of

'No you don't, monkey face!' brought it down with all his remaining strength on the black man's skull. The negro died without a murmur. Someone shone the torch and the third stared stupidly at the bloody scene.

'Ach, God rest his soul,' gasped Dougan. 'Sure the poor cratur was demented.'

The third's eyes had a wild, troubled look. 'The bastard would ha' guzzled my whack of water, that's all I care about,' he panted. He lay down wearily on the thwart, hid his face in his hands and began to sob.

Once the body was overside and the boat swilled down, there were no further comments on the murder. Sinclair and Gillis still tried for fish. Otsing, the secretive woodman from the Esthonian forest, pared away with his beloved penknife at the remains of the ash oar from which he had made the spinnaker boom. Completely absorbed, he was turning out an array of tiny chessmen. Obviously mere pawns offered no challenge to this master craftsman, and he was concentrating on kings and bishops and knights.

The negro's death seemed to have gone quite unnoticed by his companion in gloom. This man, as sturdy as the other had been emaciated, continued to stare away into space, hopeless and alone. His fellow tribesman, who had early dissociated himself from the melancholia of the other two, could now be heard pleading earnestly with him in their native tongue.

When the breeze returned, on the twenty-third day, they had almost exactly a thousand miles to sail to reach Barbados, the outermost island of the West Indies. Once more the canvas was set to get the last ounce out of the boat, but this time with little spirit. Once more she was running her westing down to the extent of about eighty miles a day. With the wind fresh and dead aft she rolled heavily; the tops of the following seas often climbed aboard and bailing went on, non-stop, day and night.

With the breeze came the cloud, and with the cloud the rain. The chief engineer tended the flimsy cotton funnel as carefully as he had once watched over his great, shining engines. In the heaven-sent deluge they slaked their thirst voraciously and bathed the encrusted salt from blistered hands and faces. If the wind held, the boat could cover the remaining distance in about fourteen days. But, for all the benison of the rain, the food situation was now so critical that every man doubted if he could last that long.

The wind for which they had prayed continued to blow steady and strong, carrying them towards the Indies faster than they had yet sailed. On the twenty-fifth day the second mate logged a record



run of ninety-six miles. But weary minds and weakened bodies found no delight in this great westward onrushing. With the ocean's change of mood came new anxieties to accentuate the irony, the absurdity, of their dilemma.

The following seas grew so steep and dangerous that the rudder became useless and had to be replaced by the heavy steering-oar. Their lives depended upon keeping the rolling, heaving boat from broaching-to. Even with her now reduced sail area she would have overturned and drowned them all if allowed to get broadside on to the seas. But steering under such conditions called for strength and skill, and only five men proved capable of it. The second mate, Otsing and Sinclair had the seaman's instinct to make up for what they lacked in physique. But the real masters of the long, springing oar were the dark, burly Gillis and that ageing giant, Dougan.

Every hour that the wind blew, the seas grew steeper. Gradually the labouring boat came to demand more attention than her ailing crew could give her. They could not bail fast enough to cope with the breaking waves, and she was always half full of water. In a sudden heavy squall the taut, double-reefed lug-sail burst like a balloon. And even Gillis and Dougan became too exhausted to steer. After three days and nights of forlorn effort, they were forced to take in all sail, lower the mast and stream the canvas sea-anchor. She now lay stern to the seas, getting nowhere. Laboriously they bailed her almost dry again. She rose and fell wildly as each swollen sea passed impatiently under her keel. The capricious wind swept on westward, leaving her behind.

The apathetic negro surrendered his last feeble hold on life when the shark appeared. Violent sobs shook his whole body as he watched the big man-cater leisurely cruising the long green slopes of the seas. 'Can you do anything to help that fellow?' the captain asked the other negro. The Kroo man shook his head sadly. 'No, captain, sah, not now. Too late to help now. Hilary know he is finished now.'

'Why should the shark frighten him so much?'

'Hilary is my friend, sah. I sail with him long time. There is a man in Freetown has great hate for him because Hilary steal away his wife. Ever since we come in lifeboat he believe this man make bad ju-ju for him. And now he know the shark come to take him.'

Hilary Stevens, the black fireman, was a person of high standing in his native village. His fine-sounding and newly acquired Christian name proclaimed his emancipation. From the menial toil of the coast labour gangs he had graduated to the stokeholds of ships. From roving he would return home bearing fine gifts as proof of

the wonders of Liverpool and Cardiff. But now, poor fellow, his cherished sophistication had forsaken him. Magic incantation and secret potion had triumphed in the end. A mysterious and powerful witchcraft had been projected across the wide ocean, drawing him inevitably to his death. The wretched creature who leapt overboard to disappear screaming in a flurry of pink foam was a jungle boy again.

The others, too, had a great dread of the shark—a very practical dread, in no way metaphysical. They feared that he might swallow the sea-anchor. During this period of violent idleness their great obsession was the sea-anchor. Carefully they parcelled the stout rīanilla hawser to prevent chafing where it passed over the gunwale and out into the sea to the canvas drogue.

The big greaser was alone with another obsession. On the morning after the witch-doctor had called Hilary Stevens to account, the second mate, ever methodical, was winding his chronometer. He steadied it carefully on the after thwart, shielding it from the flying spray with his crouched body. This daily routine was always a signal for the greaser to indulge in a bout of sneering. 'You and your bloody silly gadgets will never get us out of this mess,' he would taunt. 'Why don't you chuck that thing over the side?' 'Well, and what are the odds to-day, professor?' The others had grown so used to the ritual that they paid no attention, so that on this occasion, when accumulated hatred prompted him to action rather than words, he had the advantage. Jumping suddenly to his feet he kicked the chronometer out of the second mate's hands into the bottom of the boat. 'You crazy fool!' cried the officer, bending down to salvage his beloved timepiece. The big fellow grabbed an oar and, using it like a battering-ram, smashed it down on the kneeling man's head. But before he could strike again the captain had that unfamiliar gun in his hand. He fired three shots into the greaser's broad chest. As the body was falling a heave of the boat sent it toppling into the sea. The second mate never regained consciousness and died in a few hours.

The graph of violence now turned downward. If any hate still lurked in the boat, physical exhaustion had rendered it ineffectual; and apathy had blunted the sharp edge of fear. By the thirty-third day wind and sea had much abated, and they were able to get some canvas on her again. But no one had strength enough to try to repair the torn mainsail. Even getting her under jib and the home-made spinnaker seemed to call for superhuman effort. Once in der way they took turns at the helm, steering erratically with little concentration.

On that same day the last morsel of food was eaten. Nothing remained in the lockers, after they had been cleared of the strips of crisp white paper that had once lined biscuit tins, and the crumpled silver foil of chocolate. Even the earlier gift of flying-fish was now denied them; for there was no more oil for the lantern, and the electric-torch batteries had been exhausted long ago. But there was still enough water to allow each man a few ounces a day.

They sailed on approximately west, with no idea of the speed of the boat, the true course or the miles still ahead. The last accurate fix on the chart had been put there by the second mate. But he was dead. Only his sextant and a broken chronometer remained to tell of how the star-filled sky may be read by those who know the language of spherical triangles. Once the captain made an effort to get a noon latitude, a comparatively simple mystery; but he was too far gone physically. The few necessary calculations, which for forty-five years had been to him the merest routine, now seemed immensely difficult and far beyond his powers.

His death came quietly, after dark on the thirty-seventh day. The boat was sailing well at the time, with a moderate sea behind her, the captain steering while the others dozed. Getting on for midnight a sudden change in the boat's motion, and a dapple of spray over the gunwale, roused some of the men. They found her well off course, with the sails flapping, and the old man, already dead, slumped over the tiller. 'God rest his soul,' croaked Dougan, the devout Catholic, crossing himself. Without a sound, and utterly alone while his men slept, the captain had relinquished his command. The sea, against which he had battled for so much of his life, had beaten him.

The sea-roving frigate-birds swept low over the salt-whitened boat. There was neither sound nor movement to frighten them off, for the nine prostrate figures within her showed no sign of life. Though the idle rudder no longer directed her course, she was being borne inevitably westward upon the bosom of the equatorial current, with the unfailing trade wind filling her untended sails.

On the morning of the forty-fifth day, with the sun brilliant, the breeze light and the sea smooth, she came to rest very gently as her keel grounded upon a low coral reef fringing one of the islands of the Grenadines. The nine men lay on unheeding. The survivors of a nightmare voyage were unaware of their fabulous landfall.

About mid-afternoon Gillis awoke with a craving to cool his swollen tongue with the last few inches of rust-red water in the tank. With unbelieving eyes he gazed upon the white surf, the

stretch of sandy beach, the palm-trees. It took him a long time to convince himself; a longer time to rouse his companions.

Between them and the shore lay a hundred yards of pale-blue water, smooth and shallow, with numerous spurs of coral breaking the surface. The green palms beckoned gently in the breeze. Only the edge of the sea was turbulent, as though resentful, where it met the strand. But salvation lay beyond that line of creaming surf. For the first time in forty-five days of uncertainty and cruel disappointment, here was a shining truth that even the ocean's whim could not distort. Painfully and hopelessly they crawled over the side of the captive boat and into the sea.

They stumbled forward, stimulated by the nearness of that golden shore, as mindless, yet as inevitably impelled, as the first creatures to emerge from the ancient sea. They fell every few yards. Arms, breasts, thighs were lacerated by the jagged coral. Yet each time they managed to get to their feet again and stagger on.

All except the chief engineer. Old, and now very frail, he was unequal to his last effort. He could not get back to reality from that dream state induced by starvation and hopelessness, in which for so many days they had all languished. When only thirty yards from the boat he fell exhausted upon a sloping coral ledge. He lay on his back and looked up through twenty inches of water at the brightness above. All he had to do was to co-ordinate legs and arms and neck muscles to lift his head that short distance; a question of simple leverage, of elementary mechanics. His mind was now much clearer; but he realised that his body could not supply the necessary power. Water began to enter his lungs, and a string of bright bubbles moved upwards towards the light. For a brief time he watched the fascinating bubbles, then closed his eyes.

The others crossed the surf-line and collapsed, one by one, upon the hot sand; bleeding, bewildered, but beyond reach at last of the insatiable sea.



## 'SO WE'LL DRINK

BY P. K. KEMP

THERE were five of us at dinner that night, all naval men who had served in submarines. Maynard, Bolt, Clark, and Howard, old friends whom the war had scattered, had come home again and we were taking advantage of my wife's visit to a theatre to make a bachelor party of it.

It was just as the port was going round for the first time that Maynard brought up the subject of fear—Maynard, who had collected a D.S.O. and two D.S.C.s in the war.

'You know' he was saying, 'it was those early submarine patrols in the Bight and the Skagerrak right at the start of the war which scared me most of all. You never quite knew what Jerry had got up his sleeve in the way of anti-submarine equipment. One heard so many stories, read so many contradictory reports, that they gave one the jitters almost before leaving harbour. And that was an eerie business, too, leaving harbour. Dusk—we always went just at dusk—and then out into the darkness, alone, with everyone's hand against you. Of course, one got used to it as the war went on, but those early patrols took a bit of nerve. And then all those conflicting stories about Jerry. D'you remember?'

We nodded. We all knew what he was talking about, though I was hoping that he wouldn't put it into words. It proved a vain hope. His next two words shattered it and I caught my breath, as those two words always make me catch my breath.

'Martin Wentworth,' said Maynard. 'I wonder what happened to Martin Wentworth? I wonder whether all they said about him was true?'

I waited, still hoping that the subject would drop.

'Quercy fellow he was,' went on Maynard. 'You'd have said he was one of the best fellows who ever stepped, and then he went and joined up with the Jerries. Damned little traitor, and particularly damned when you remember that it was he who gave Jerry the information about our Asdics. After all, he was a submariner, like ourselves, and yet he sent a lot of our fellows—friends of his, too—to their death. I'm pretty sure he must have given the secret away,

because I came up against the German anti-submarine devices during some of my patrols. Damned efficient, too. They couldn't have learned it any other way.'

'The whole business was fishy,' put in Bolt. 'Why did the Admiralty let him resign in 1938? After all, he was a good officer and we were needing all we'd got then. I never understood that.'

'Neither did I,' answered Maynard. 'I suppose it was something to do with that German woman he married. D'you remember the last time we all saw him? That guest night in the old *Vulcan*. I can still see him as we all stood round the piano, singing those old bawdy songs which seem to be a part of every guest night. You know, "Lydia Pink" and "The Gay Caballero", and things like that.'

We all nodded.

'He went to Germany the following week. You knew him best, didn't you?' Maynard looked at me.

'Yes,' I answered. 'I knew him best.'

'I wonder where he is now,' asked Howard. 'I expect he's probably dead.'

'Yes,' I answered again, 'he's dead.'

The four men stared at me in surprise.

'How do you know?' asked Bolt.

'I saw him once more after all you fellows. In fact I was with him when he died.'

'Good Lord,' said Bolt. 'Tell us.'

I filled my glass and sent the port round.

'It's a long story,' I began, 'but you might as well know it. I've been wondering when, even whether, to tell you fellows. It seems that this is the chance.'

'Martin, you know, was the closest friend I ever had. I suppose it was natural in a way. We were at Dartmouth together, did our courses together, went into submarines together. We used to spend a good many of our leaves together, too—sailing, or fishing, or shooting.'

'Then there came that guest night in the old *Vulcan*. We were all there, you, Maynard, and you, Bolt, Clark, Howard, Wentworth, and myself. We all sat together, you remember, much as we are now, except that then there were six of us. And those songs after dinner. I think that's my most vivid memory of Martin Wentworth. D'you remember his gaiety, how he always used to act those old songs while he sang 'em? Remember "Lydia Pink"—"*So we'll drink, we'll drink, we'll drink, to Lydia Pink, to Lydia Pink*"—how he used to lift an imaginary glass at every repetition of "drink"? I can see him doing it now, with that rather sparkling sort of face of his

and that superb athlete's body. You know, he used to make all of us look rather like cart-horses in comparison, didn't he?

They nodded agreement.

'After that he asked me to come down to his cabin and we took a whisky and soda each and went. He perched himself on his bunk and I sat in the only chair in that tiny space. I can see it all so clearly, even though it is ten years ago now. He smiled down at me from the bunk. "Bung-ho," he said, and we drank. And then his face went quite serious.

"You know, old Peter," he said, "this is probably the last time we'll see each other."

'I just stared at him, not quite getting what he was driving at.

"Yes," he went on, "it probably is. I'm going in a day or so now. Leaving the Service, going over to Germany and marrying a girl over there. And the devil of it is that you'll never meet her."

"But why on earth not?" I asked.

"War," he answered. "War—and we'll be on different sides. And I would have liked you to know Andrea."

"Andrea?" I repeated.

"Yes, that's her name. Andrea."

'Well, we went on talking for a bit—queer sort of talk—because I still couldn't believe that this was really good-bye. He was always a dramatic sort of chap, you remember, and I put it down to a sort of glorified "Sailor's Farewell", or some nonsense like that. He told me a lot more about the girl, this Andrea of his. Odd name for a girl—Greek goddess sort of name—and according to Martin that was just about what she was.

'The quartermaster came along just then to tell me that my boat was at the gangway. I got up to go. Martin slid down from his bunk, and then said an extraordinary thing. He took hold of both my hands. "You may hear some odd stories. Don't forget we were friends," he said. I didn't quite know what to make of this, but there was worse to come. Quite suddenly he leant forward and kissed me on the forehead. Damned embarrassing, you know. It took the wind out of my sails. I shot out of his cabin like a scalded cat and didn't stop till I was down the gangway and into the boat. I wondered whether he was a bit tight, but I knew very well he wasn't.'

'When did you see him again?' asked Howard. 'After the war?'

'You're going too fast,' I answered. 'Pass the decanter round.' I filled my glass again.

'He was gone next day,' I went on with the story. 'No address, no nothing, except that I assumed he was in Germany and married to his Andrea. And then the flaps began. Munich—and the fleet



mobilization. And the relief when that scare ended. Then Memel, and another flap. And then Danzig—and war. They came so soon after each other that there wasn't time to think. I forgot Martin Wentworth and his German woman—too busy thinking about those submarine patrols over in German waters.

'And then the rumours began. Remember? And they all fitted so damnably. Boats were going out and not coming back. The Germans had our Asdic secrets and were beginning to sink our boats. They had details of our new signalling devices, they knew where our patrol areas were, and so on, and so on. And to every rumour was attached the name of Martin Wentworth. Remember them? Some of them were obviously stupid, but some seemed to ring true.'

'Look here, old fellow,' said Maynard. 'I know you were his friend, but are you trying to tell us that he didn't give anything away?'

'Oh no,' I answered. 'He did. I know for a fact he did. But not everything was true. Let me get on with the story.'

'Well, as you know, the war went on. It got bigger. We started sending boats out further afield, to the Mediterranean, the Far East, and the stories about Martin Wentworth died and were forgotten. It was a bigger game now and that episode was lost in the wider picture. No one, except perhaps you four and myself, remembered Martin. The others who knew him well were mostly in those boats which never came home.'

'Well, it ended. Peace. Joybells. And all the rest of a brave new world that has fizzled out so quickly. But I was in at the finish. I could talk the lingo and so I was put into one of those naval parties that swept in on the heels of the Army to snoop round for naval secrets. I didn't find any, of course, because you don't come on 'em as easy as that. But I did find Martin Wentworth.'

'You found Wentworth?' echoed Bolt.

'Yes. I found Wentworth.'

'Good God! Where? How? What was he doing?' The questions were fired at me from all round the table.

'I found him in a concentration camp.'

There was a silence while I filled my glass again and sent the decanter round.

'Yes, I found him in a concentration camp. I didn't know him. I went round it the day after the Army had broken it open. A foul, bestial place. Piles of dead bodies, dirt, chaos, and a stench that couldn't be described. That was the worst, I think, the awful, unbelievable smell—like a smell of death. Then we came to the survivors, lying huddled up together for warmth, five or six to each

narrow bunk, twisted, maimed, utterly horrible. You've no idea. One was sorry for them, but somehow one's pity was swamped by the dirt and horror and smell.

'One of them seemed to beckon to me as I went by. I ignored it. I couldn't go near, you know, it was too horrible for that, and besides, there was the risk of typhus. And yet—could one just pass by? I looked back at the thing. It beckoned again and tried to smile. Horrible—horrible. But there was something in its eyes—great black eyes staring out of a skull. I couldn't shut them out, couldn't get rid of a feeling that those eyes were forcing me back, forcing me to go close.'

The others stared at me in silence—Maynard, Bolt, Clark, Howard.

'I went back to it. A skinny hand grasped my sleeve, drew me closer. "Get me out," it whispered. "Get me out." And it spoke English.

'Well, I don't know why I bothered, but I did get it out, after the devil of a tussle with the Army authorities. And still I didn't know who it was, only that it was English. It still hadn't become "he" to me then, only "it"—just a nameless, impersonal bag of bones.

'I went next day to the hospital where he had been taken. A bath, clean sheets, the orderliness of a hospital ward, had made a big change. He was almost human now, though still a stranger. And he hadn't long to go, according to the doctor. Nothing left of him, body broken, spirit gone, all gone.

'He was awake when I came in. He saw me coming up the ward and smiled, though you could hardly call it a smile. It was a grimace, an obscene travesty of a welcome on a face that was no longer a face, nothing but yellow skin stretched taut over a skull.

"You've forgotten," he whispered, "you've forgotten me, old Peter."

'I still hadn't a clue, and I suppose it showed in my face.

"Bend down," he whispered. I did so. And then, of all the amazing things—

*' "So we'll drink, we'll drink, we'll drink,  
To Lydia Pink, to Lydia Pink,  
The saviour of the human race,  
For she sells, she sells, she sells,  
A bottle o' compound,  
All the pipers publish 'er fice."*

'Can you imagine that? Of all the incredible things to hear from a man just rescued from a concentration camp. Just think of it. That bit of naval doggerel.

'I knew then. It came flashing back into my memory, a great flood of recognition. Remember that guest night in the *Vulcan*? And other guest nights? And Martin Wentworth raising his glass to Lydia Pink? That twisted skeleton in the hospital bed was Martin Wentworth, or what was left of Martin Wentworth.

'And what was I to do? On the one hand, here was a man who had been my greatest friend—now broken, friendless, in need, great need. And on the other, a man whom I knew to be a traitor, who had sent other friends of mine to their death. I think he knew the struggle that was going on in my brain, for those great eyes of his looked up at me out of his dead face, and I could see the anxiety in them.

'Well, I was always a sentimental sort of fool, but I thank God to this day for the impulse which came to me then. I knelt down alongside his bed and put my arms round him, round that poor, broken body. The anxiety left his eyes and they became calm. He smiled again, and this time it wasn't an obscene grimace, even though it was just the same as before. And there I waited with my arms around him, while his poor heart beat out its last few hours. As the doctor said, he hadn't long to go. He died that night, and he only spoke once again. "Find Andrea," he whispered, just before the end.

'Afterwards, I pieced together his story. Back in London I bearded the Naval Intelligence people and even went to see the Admiral himself. We turned up his record together. And this is the true history of the traitor Wentworth. He went to Germany in 1938 with the blessing of the Admiralty, and a story was put round that he'd been flung out of the Service for some crime or other. It didn't take long for the German Admiralty to get their hooks into him and he fed them with carefully selected dope about our Asdics, and other things. Apparently we knew that Jerry's own anti-submarine devices were pretty good and it was thought that little harm would be caused by giving them some details of ours. Sprat to catch a whale, sort of idea. And he landed quite a lot of whales, did Martin Wentworth. D'you remember those mysterious signals we used to get from the Admiralty—"U-boat expected to be in such-and-such a position at noon to-morrow"—and things like that? Sitting targets, they were, and they almost always turned up trumps.'

The others nodded.

'Those came from Martin Wentworth. They were some of his whales. There were others, too, even bigger ones. It was too good to last, of course, and eventually Jerry rumbled it. Apparently Martin rumbled it even sooner and when they came to put him up

against a wall—no Martin. Just vanished—he, Andrea, and their two kids.

'The hunt went on all through the war, and they never found him. But what they did find, apparently, was an obscure citizen saying rude things about Hitler, or Goering, or another of the bosses, and him they bunged into a concentration camp and tortured. Odd, in a way. The whole of Germany mobilized to search for an English spy and all the time they had him under their noses, though they didn't know it.'

I emptied my glass.

'Well, I'm damned,' said Maynard. 'So that's the end of the story, is it?'

'Not quite,' I answered. 'There were those last two words of Martin's. Remember? "Find Andrea." That's a long story too, too long for now. I hadn't much to go on, just an unusual name and Martin's description of her, back in 1938, that she looked like a Greek goddess. I found her in the end, but she was no goddess then. Starving and the two kids starving with her. Pitiful. They were living in the corner of a cellar, and just about all in. But I managed to put that right.'

I filled my glass again.

'Well,' I said, 'now you know. Let's go into the drawing-room. There's a piano there and no guest night is complete without a song. Bring the decanter with you.'

We clustered round the piano and Howard began to play. We sang—just those sort of songs which naval officers always sing after dinner, songs whose origins are lost in the mists of naval antiquity, whose echoes must hang for ever round the bulkheads of naval wardrooms and gunrooms.

It was an odd coincidence that the door opened and my wife came in, on her return from the theatre, while we were in the middle of singing 'Lydia Pink', that song which I associated so closely with Martin Wentworth.

*'So we'll drink, we'll drink, we'll drink,  
To Lydia Pink, to Lydia Pink,  
The saviour of the 'uman rice.'*

The words died away as she entered, tall, beautiful, almost, you might say, a Greek goddess.

'Andrea, my dear,' I said, 'come and meet four of my very best friends.'



# THE REMARKABLE CONVERSION OF THE REV. THOMAS RUDDLE

BY MORLEY ROBERTS

THE passengers on board the s.s. *Nantucket*, bound from New York to Table Bay, were of a kind to make any old-fashioned seaman shake his head and talk dismally of Davy Jones. They were nearly all ministers and missionaries, and it is well known to all who follow the sea that gentleman of that kind are unlucky to have on board. For Davy Jones is the very devil, and if he gets a chance to drown a minister he does it at once, so that he may do no more good. There can be no mistake about this, for every sailorman will endorse the theory with strange oaths. What all sailors say must be true, for they know their business.

One of these missionaries was the Reverend Mr. Ruddle, and he was the chief of all the others, who were going to South Africa to do it good. There were six of them all told. Thomas Ruddle had his wife with him, for he could not exist without her; and she, for her part, thought him a marvellous man and a darling. He had a beautiful smile, and a big black beard, and a voice like the bellow of an amiable bull. But Mrs. Ruddle was blue-eyed, with the complexion of a Californian peach and a voice like a flute. She would have followed him to Davy Jones's locker itself if he had asked her, and though he did not think of doing anything so unorthodox, they were not far from having to go there without the consent of anyone. For when the *Nantucket* was within two hundred miles of Capetown it came on to blow from the south-east as if the very devil was at the bellows, and after the old packet had proved that she hadn't sufficient power to make headway against the gale, she promptly cracked her shaft, and went drifting away to loo'ard like a Dutch schuyt on a lee tide.

'It is a very sad misfortune, and I do not know now when we shall be in Africa,' said Tom Ruddle. 'I regret to say, my dear, that the captain is on the main-deck using very bad language to the chief engineer, who is replying to him in a way that I cannot approve. Indeed, I think he swears worse than Captain Stokes, if it is possible, which I doubt.'

The other gentlemen in black mostly kept to their cabins, but Ruddle went about in the most astonishing way. If the *Nantucket* stood on her head Ruddle never lost his feet, and when she stood on her tail he was quite at his ease. When she indulged in a wild compound wallow in those delightful cross pyramidal seas which are the peculiar attribute of the South Atlantic in the neighbourhood of the Cape, all that Tom Ruddle said was 'Dear me.' He even said it when Captain Stokes did a flying scoot on the main-deck, and brought up against the rail with a crash that almost unshipped his teeth. What Stokes said was not 'Dear me.' And the old *Nantucket* went drifting west-nor'-west on the branch of the current, coming round the Cape, which runs far to the north of Tristan da Cunha, as if she had put Africa out of her mind. Down below the engineers were trying very hard to fake up something to brace round the shaft, so that they could at least turn the engines ahead when the weather let up a little. It seemed a hopeless job, and to none so hopeless as to the engine-room crowd. And just as perseverance with the impossible seemed about to be rewarded, the *Nantucket* gave a wallow in an awful sea, and quietly dropped her propeller as a scared lizard drops its tail. Then very naturally the wind took off, and the sea went down and smoothed itself out, and looked quite pretty to those who had been watching the grey waste in despair.

'We're done,' said the skipper. For the idea of sailing her into Table Bay was as feasible as sailing her to the moon. The wind, although it had fallen light, was still in the east, and it threatened to stay so till it blew another gale, after the fashion of Cape weather, where fifty per cent of all winds that blow are gales.

'It is exceedingly unfortunate,' said Ruddle.

'What will happen to us?' asked his fellows in deep melancholy.

'Something must,' said their brave leader, and sure enough it did. A sailing ship hove in sight to loo'ard. The skipper, as soon as he heard of the stranger, made up his mind what to do. He hoisted the signal 'In distress—want assistance,' and presently the sailing ship came up under her lee within hailing distance, and backed her main-topsail.

'Are you bound for Table Bay?' asked Captain Stokes, and the obliging stranger said he was. In ten minutes it was all arranged, and the *Nantucket's* passengers were being transhipped to the *Ocean Wave* of a thousand tons register, belonging to London. Stokes went on board with the last boat, and shook hands with the master of the *Ocean Wave*.

'When you get in send a tug out to find us,' said Stokes; 'it's goin' to blow heavy in a while.'

'I'll do it,' said Captain Gray; 'but are you sure that you won't come along?'

'I'd go under first,' said Stokes; 'I'll stick by her till I'm as old as the Flying Dutchman, and my beard is down to my knees.'

It was very rash to say such things in the very cruising ground of Vanderdecken, and some of the crew of the *Wave* that heard it shivered. But Stokes was a hard case, and believed in nothing. He said good-bye to his passengers, and went on board the *Nantucket*. The *Ocean Wave* boarded her maintack and stood on her course with her new crowd of passengers, who were very much delighted to be on board something that did not go to leeward like a butter-cask.

'How strange to be on board a sailing ship,' said Ruddle, as he stood on the poop with the skipper, who was a genial old chap with a white beard, and a figure as square as a four-hundred gallon tank.

'Why strange, Mr. Ruddle?' asked Captain Gray. 'Barring your rig-out you look a deal more like a seaman than a parson, at least you do to my eyes.'

'Your eye is right, captain,' said Ruddle with a sigh. 'But it is a very remarkable thing that though I have been a sailor I know nothing about the sea that I have not picked up on board the unlucky steamer we have just left.'

'That's a very strange thing to say, sir,' said the skipper, as he eyed Ruddle from head to foot. 'May I ask how you make that out? Once a seaman always a seaman, I should say. I can't imagine my forgetting anything. I never could.'

'It's a very strange story,' said Ruddle; 'and if there wasn't evidence for it I shouldn't believe it myself. But in my pocket-book below I have my old discharges as mate, and yet at the present moment there is no one on board who knows less about the sea than I do, though I hold a master's certificate.'

'Spin us the yarn,' said the skipper, and Ruddle told him the strange tale.

'I am informed,' said the minister, 'that I was, at the time I am about to mention, mate in a ship belonging to Dundee. I say I am told, because I have not the least recollection of it. To put it shortly, I may tell you that I had an accident, and when I became sensible again I was in hospital in Liverpool.'

'But what was your accident?' asked Captain Gray.

'Something that I am told you call a shearpole came down from aloft and struck me on the head, and I knew no more,' said Ruddle, who was evidently a very poor hand at a yarn.

'Well, well, go on,' said the skipper. 'What happened then?'



'How do I know?' asked Ruddle in his turn. 'I was knocked silly while the crew were taking in sail in a very great storm to the south of Ireland, and they say I was very angry with the poor fellows up aloft and was using dreadful language to them. I was struck down, and when I come to myself I was not myself at all but another—if I do not sadly confuse you by putting it that way—and I had forgotten all that had happened since I went to sea, and I did not want to go again. I became a minister instead and a missionary.'

'Well, I'm jiggered,' said Gray, 'but that's a corker of a yarn. Were you married when you were a seaman?'

'No,' replied Ruddle; 'I met my wife soon after I became my second and present self, and my remarkable story so interested her that we got married. It is interesting, isn't it?'

'And do you mean to say that you remember nothing whatever of the sea? Could you go aloft, for instance?'

Mr. Ruddle looked up aloft and shivered.

'Oh, I couldn't,' he said. 'The very look of the complicated apparatus with which I must have been once only too familiar fills me with peculiar horror.'

'Well, I'm damned,' said Gray. 'What's the opposite point of the compass to sou'-east by sou'-half-sou'-southerly?'

'I give it up. Tell me,' said the minister simply.

Gray shook his head.

'You surprise me, sir. Can you tell when there is a mighty strong likelihood of bad weather comin' along?'

'I'm not at all bad at guessing when it's likely to rain,' said the former mate modestly. 'I'm never caught in a shower without my umbrella.'

And Gray shook his head again, and confided to the sea and all that Ruddle was a red wonder.

'If you don't know more about weather than that, you are going to have a fine chance to learn, Mr. Ruddle,' said the skipper. 'I smell a howling gale or I'm a double-distilled Dutchman. If it don't come out of the nor'-east like a rampin', ragin', snortin' devil, call me no sailor, but the reddest kind of sojer.'

There were many signs of it, and the fall of the glass was only one. The swell that had been coming in from the south-east now began to come from the north, and the whole of the horizon was in a kind of smoke. The wind, which had fallen so light, now began to puff a little, and though it was no more than a breeze that any man's t'gallan's'sls could look at comfortably, there were odd sighs in the wind, sighs which had a rising tendency to become wails. Before long they would be wailings and no mistake, for these sounds

are the real voice of a hurricane, and foretell it. The skipper looked up to windward and spoke to his mate.

'Mr. Dixon, I think we had better snug her down a bit before it gets dark, so clew up the t'gallan's'sls, and then we'll take the main-sail off her. And after that you can reef the foresail. While the breeze holds in the nor'-east we'll make all we can. But I reckon we'll be hove to by the morning.'

There wasn't much doubt of that to those who knew something of Cape weather. The Cape pigeons as they wheeled and whistled about the *Ocean Wave* said 'clew up and clew down.' At any rate, the crew for'ard said so as they turned out to shorten sail. Mr. Ruddle went below to encourage his companions and his wife. By the time it was as dark as the bottom of a tar-barrel they wanted encouragement, for the *Wave* began to pitch in a manner that the *Nantucket* had not accustomed them to, and as the wind increased the song of the gale in the rigging got on their nerves sadly.

'What do you think of it, Brother Ruddle?' asked his friend Chadwick, a little butter-tub of a man with the courage of a lion among the heathen or the denizens of a New York slum, but without as much spirit when the wind blew as would enable a schoolgirl to face a cow in a lane. 'What does Brother Ruddle think of it?'

Ruddle said that he did not think much of it, for he thought the skipper was not frightened.

'Although the sea threatens to rage, my friends,' said the chief, 'he shows no signs of unseemly terror, but with calm confidence bids his brave crew haste up aloft and reduce the mighty spread of canvas. They are even now engaged in the task. Hear with what strange music, which somehow begins to have a familiar ring in my ears, they encourage each other in their arduous duties. Oh, my friends, we little think when we are safe in the heart of Africa, or in the back parts of the Bowery, how seamen encounter dangers on our behalf.'

'Ah, and you were a sailor once, Tom,' said his wife.

'I do not praise myself, dear, in praising them, for now I dare not face those dangers with which at one time I must have been familiar. It is wonderful, all life is wonderful. If I had not been smitten upon the head by a shearpole, whatever a shearpole may be, I might never have known any of you, my dear friends; and I might never have married you, my dear. Ah, it is a wonderful world, and they are making a very remarkable noise upstairs.'

They certainly were making a noise, and so was the win', and Mr. Dixon was saying very unorthodox things, and so was Smith the second mate. And every now and again the skipper could be

heard in exaltation, so that Susan Ruddle snuggled up alongside her husband, and said that she was glad he was not a seaman, though she was sure that if he were one now he would never employ such language. Ruddle comforted her, and said it would fill him with horror to know that he had ever used any of that kind of talk. He felt sure in his mind that the report of his having ever done so must have been a malicious invention of some enemy. Since he had borne up for the church he had been, as all men knew, of a scrupulousness which was extra Puritanical even for a minister. He never said 'damn' unless he had to in the course of his duty.

Presently the *Ocean Wave* began to behave herself a little better under shortened canvas, and the old skipper came into the cabin with his face shining with spray, and a good-natured grin on him which would have encouraged the biggest coward at sea in a cyclone. Little Mrs. Ruddle cheered up on sight of him, and so did all but the Reverend Mr. Blithers, who was in a state of terror which was sheer lunacy.

'Is it a great storm? Are we going down?' asked Blithers. He was so far encouraged that he could speak.

'Bless my heart,' replied the skipper, 'what are you thinking of, in a nice breeze like this, and in a sailin' ship too? If you was in an old smoke stack like the one I took you gents out of you might howl, but here you are in a fine tight ship, the real genuine article, and are a deal safer than if you was ashore.'

'Oh, do you say so?' asked Blithers. 'Oh, is it possible that you can say so with the wind howling like this?'

And indeed the gale began to pipe as if it meant business.

'Hold your tongue, Blithers,' said Ruddle; 'be a man and a missionary, and do not howl.'

Blithers said his brother was unkind and ought to be more gentle with a weak vessel. And at that the skipper put in his oar, and suggested that so weak a vessel should not carry sail but retire to his cabin. At this Ruddle laughed jovially, and Blithers said he was hard and cruel, and devoid of all religious feelings.

'Don't be a fool, my dear man,' said Ruddle, 'but go to bed. It is perhaps natural to be upset by the strange uproar, and the noise of the wind, and the trampling of the men on deck, but that is no reason why you should say I am not religious. If I were not I should be angry with you and say regrettable things, such as I am informed, on very good authority, that I said when I was a seaman.'

'I don't believe you ever were one,' said the sad and angry Blithers. 'And if you were, it is a pity you did not stay one, for you are a very unkind man, and not good to me in my sad state of mind.'

It took five missionaries to get Blithers into bed but he went at last, and when he had gone, Ruddle beamed on the rest, and said—  
 'Our poor brother is sadly upset by the weather. It is difficult to understand how he can be such a coward on the water when he is a real hero on the dry land, and has an especial gift of management with backsliding cannibals. But anything can be believed when you remember that I was once in the position of Mr. Dixon, whose voice I now hear saying something about lee-braces, and knew all about everything on board a ship. And now, my friends, all things here are mystery to me, and I do not know what the lee-braces are, and cannot distinguish with accuracy between a binnacle and a bullwhanger, if indeed there is such a thing as I was told by one of the seamen on the *Nantucket*. Ah, hold tight, dear, she is rocking to and fro with ever-increasing velocity. I fear that Blithers will never forget this night.'

And they all had supper. The 'old man' sat it out with them, and put on his oilskins again and went on the poop. There was no mistake about it now. The *Ocean Wave* was in for a Cape stinger, and Gray, who was of the old-fashioned, bull-headed sort, rammed her along on the very path the cyclonic disturbance was taking. If he had been thoroughly acquainted with the nature of all cyclones wherever they are bred, he would have turned pale to the blast, and have run into fairer weather towards the south; or, as the *Wave* was in the southern semicircle of the storm, he might have hove her to on the coming up or starboard tack. Instead of that he hung on all through the night. When the dawn came it was a fair howler and no mistake. Mr. Blithers and not a few of the others stayed in their bunks. It was blowing hard enough to make almost anyone ill, and the sea was very high. But Thomas Ruddle and his wife and Chadwick turned out to breakfast. If Ruddle trusted to Providence, Susan Ruddle trusted to him, and hardly thought it possible that any disaster could happen to her while he was to the fore. Mr. Chadwick was brave enough to hide his terror, though he was in a horrid funk. They hung on to the tables and ate some breakfast as best they could, and after eating, Ruddle and Mrs. Ruddle and Chadwick ventured on deck in time to see the reefed foresail taken off her. Just as they got the weather clew-garnet chock up, the gale came screaming across the waste of grey sea to such a tune that the skipper altered his mind there and then.

'Hold on with the lee gear of the foresail, Mr. Dixon,' he followed, and then he signed to the mate to come aft.

'We'll wear her now and heave her to on the starboard tack,' said the 'old man'. 'This is going to be a fair perisher.'

As Dixon had been throwing out hints all night that he ought to do that or run, he was glad to hear it. They waited for a smooth, and put the helm up.

'Square the after yards!' roared the skipper; and they squared away, keeping the sails lifting.

'Isn't it wonderful?' said Ruddle. 'I do wish I understood it. I wonder what they are doing it for?'

'Square the foreyard!' yelled the captain; and they did so, and got the staysail sheet over, and by proper management she came up on the other tack with her nose pointing N.N.E. They hauled up what was now the weather clew of the foresail, and the second mate and the men jumped aloft and furled it.

'Oh, dear,' said Mr. Ruddle, 'how dreadful to see them up there! I can't believe that I ever did it, Chadwick.'

But the *Wave* was carrying her topsails, and though they were reefed she was scooting with her lee-rail awash. As soon as the foresail was stove, both topsail halliards were let go and the sails partly smothered by the spilling lines. When they were furled, the lower foretopsail was clewed up, and Ruddle, who got much excited, went down on the main-deck in spite of the seas which came over right for'ard by the galley. Mrs. Ruddle said, 'Oh, don't,' but Ruddle said, 'My dear, it is so interesting, and I must.' And there he was staring up at the crowd on the topsail-yard who were fighting the bellying canvas like heroes.

'Bless my soul, how very remarkable, and even terrible,' said Ruddle. 'How very extraordinary. I wonder if I ever did that. I'll ask Mr. Dixon if the manœuvre is often performed.'

He fell upon the busy and very cross mate with this inquiry, and though Dixon had heard the tale about him he did not credit it, and put it down to some hallucination.

'Do I do it often? Do what often?' asked Dixon scornfully.

'Why, tie those sails up like that when it blows so hard?' asked Ruddle innocently. 'Why don't you tie them up when it is fine? It would be much easier, I should think.'

'Oh, go home and die,' said the mate savagely.

'That's very rude,' said Ruddle, 'and I don't like it.'

'If you don't like it you can lump it,' said the mate. 'Haven't you more sense than to come worrying here in a gale of wind?'

'Is it a real gale?' asked Ruddle. 'A very hard one?'

It certainly looked like one, for every squall came harder and harder, so that the topsail when it was once smothered was blown out of the men's grip, and was all abroad and bellying once more.

'Damn your eyes, hold on to it or you'll lose the sail after all!'

yelled Dixon. But no one heard him on the yard, they were at grips with the canvas again, and the second mate and the bo'sun at the bunt were doing all the cursing that was necessary for a task like that.

'They seem to be working very courageously, and I think it wrong of you to swear at them,' said Ruddie severely; and then Dixon turned on him as if he were going to hit him. At that moment a fresh squall struck the *Wave* and almost laid her on her beam ends, though she was practically hove to under the lower maintopsail.

'I never swear,' said Ruddie, as the mate lifted his fist. Then the squall shrieked, and as the *Wave* laid over to it both Ruddie and the mate lost their footing, and slid between the fo'castle and the forepart of the deckhouse as if they were on an ice toboggan run. The mate said some awful things, and Ruddie gasped, 'You shouldn't, oh, you really shouldn't.' And then they fetched up against the lee rail with a thump that caused a common accident and wrought a very uncommon miracle. Mr. Dixon snapped his arm like a carrot, and let a yell out of him that reached the crowd on the yard.

'By crims!' said the men up aloft, 'when old Dickie squeals like that he means comin' aloft himself to talk to hus like a father. Now then, boys, grab again and 'old 'er!'

As they tackled the topsail for the third time the cook came out of the lee door of the galley and picked the mate out of the swamped scuppers.

With the cook's help he got aft, and when he did he promptly sat down in the cabin and fainted right off with the pain. And Ruddie still wallowed in the scuppers, for he had hit the rail with his head and given it a most tremendous and effectual thump. After a minute or two he stirred and spat out a mouthful of salt water. He also shook his head and rubbed it. Then he sat up and said—

'Well, I'm damned! What has happened?'

He shook his head again, and suddenly jumped to his feet. The miracle happened, and they all heard it. Tom Ruddie in the old days had the very finest foretopsail-yard ahoy voice that ever ran across the wastes of ocean. It came back to him now.

'Ain't you dogs got that topsail stowed yet?' he roared in accents that made the second mate on the yard shake in his rubber boots. 'Oh, you slabsided gang of loafers, oh, you sojers, dig in and do somethin', or before you know I'll be up there and boot you off the yard.'

The entire crowd on the yard was so paralysed by what they heard that they turned and looked at him, and very promptly lost all that they gained the last bout. To see a minister suddenly become

a seaman and use such language was enough to scare them into loosing the jackstay and tumbling overboard.

'Jehoshaphat!' said they, 'what's gone wrong with him?'

And the second greaser was just as much surprised as any of them; so much so, indeed, that he could not swear. Ruddle did it for him, and his language was awful, full, abundant, brilliant and biting. He told the second mate what he thought of him, and what he thought of all his relations; and he confided to the storm what his opinion of the crew was and always had been; and of a sudden he made a bound, and jumping on the rail ran up the rigging like a monkey, and before they could gasp he was right in among them at the bunt, exhorting them as if they were impenitent mules.

'Now, now, up with it, you no sailors, you!' he roared, as his long black coat flapped in the wind like Irish pennants. He dug into the bellying canvas with the clutch of a devil's claw, and the crew sighed and were subdued to the strange facts, and did as he told them like the rest. There was now a sudden scream from aft. Mrs. Ruddle caught sight of him on the yard, and Chadwick cried out—

'Oh, it was your husband that was swearing so.'

'Oh, Tom, Tom,' screamed his wife, 'come down, come down!'

And she screamed again, and Ruddle heard it and swore vigorously.

'What's a woman doin' on deck in such weather?' he cried, as he clawed at the sail and held it with his stomach, and yelled in unison with the second mate, who now began to see the joke of it.

'Where does he think he is?' he said; and that moment the last great fold of the topsail rose in the air like a breaking wave, and with one yell of triumph the whole of the crowd threw themselves on it and smothered its life out.

'Sock it to her!' roared Ruddle triumphantly, as he dropped the gathered bunt into the skin of the sail and reached for the bunt's gasket.

'There you are,' said Ruddle; And then for the first time he looked at the second mate, and an expression of the blankest amazement passed across his face.

'Who the devil are you?' he asked. 'I never saw you before.'

It was almost impossible to make one's self heard in the howl of the gale, but Ruddle did it, and the crowd, with a grin on all their weather-beaten and hairy countenances, waited to hear Mr. Smith's answering yell

'Who the devil do you think you are?' he asked.

'I'm the mate of this ship,' said Ruddle, 'but, but I don't think I ever saw any of you before.'

'How do you come to be togged up like you are, if you are mate?' asked Smith, as he made the bunt's gasket fast. 'Don't you think you look a hell of a sailor in that rig?'

'I don't understand it,' said Ruddle blankly. 'Where did I get these clothes?'

'You'd better ask the "old man",' said the second mate. 'You're a clergyman, and you ain't a sailor at all.'

'You're a liar,' said Ruddle. 'But I don't understand it. I don't know any of you. Where are we?'

'Off the Cape, to be sure,' said Smith.

Ruddle shook his head.

'There is something very horrid about this,' he said, with an awe-stricken expression of countenance, 'for when we clewed up this topsail we were off the Head of Kinsale.'

'Holy Moses,' said the crowd, 'ow she must have scooted in 'arf a watch!'

'Well, we're off the Cape now,' said Smith impatiently; 'and if you don't believe it, you can ask the captain.'

And they all came down on deck. Ruddle walked like a man in a dream, and as he walked he rubbed the spot that had been bruised. When his wife saw him coming she screamed again, and called out to him—

'Oh, Tom, Tom! How could you do it?'

And Tom grasped the second mate by the arm.

'Who's that woman calling "Tom"?''

The second mate stopped as if he had been shot, and whistled.

'D'ye mean to say you don't know?' he asked.

'Confound you, I wouldn't ask if I did,' said Ruddle savagely. 'It ain't me, surely?'

It was Smith's turn to grab hold of him.

'Don't you know her?' he asked in tones of positive alarm.

'No!' roared the unfortunate Ruddle. 'No more than I know you or any of 'em.'

Smith nearly fell down.

'Man, she's your wife,' said Smith; and once more Susan Ruddle said—

'Oh, Tom, how could you do it and me here?'

Then Chadwick spoke and rebuked Ruddle very strongly for having done it, and Ruddle shook his head and scratched it and shook it again, and then burst out with dreadful language against Chadwick for interfering with a stranger.

'He don't know any of you,' said Smith, as Chadwick fell into a cold perspiration to hear his chief use such awful language. 'He don't



know any of you. And he lets on that he is mate of this ship, and that we are off the Old Head of Kinsale.'

And Susan Ruddle fainted dead away.

'Take the poor silly woman down below,' said Ruddle. 'She must be mad. I don't know where I am, or how I got here, but I do know jolly well that I ain't married, and that a girl in London that I ain't by no means stuck on thinks I'm going to marry her this very year. But I ain't goin' to, by a dern sight. Not me.'

They carried her down below just as the 'old man' came on deck after setting the mate's arm. Smith told him what had happened.

The skipper shook his head.

'This is very remarkable and tryin',' said the skipper. 'For Mr. Dixon's arm is broken through this Ruddle barrackin' him and askin' him why he did not take in sail when it was calm, as it would be easier. Oh, this is very wonderful, and I makes very little of it. And now he says he ain't married. He brought her here as his wife, and you are all witnesses to that. Oh, it is very remarkable, and I make nothin' of it in spite of his havin' been a sailor before, as look likely as he went aloft. Is it true he swore?'

'Most awful and hair-raisin' and blasphemous,' replied the second mate, who was a very good judge of swearing.

'Did he now, and him a minister? It's very remarkable, and I makes nothin' of it,' said the skipper, and he ran up the poop and right into the arms of Ruddle.

'Who are you? Are you the captain? I want to see the captain before I go ragin' loony,' said Ruddle.

'Steady,' said the old skipper, grasping him tightly by the arm, 'steady, my son. Don't you know me?'

'Never saw you before that I know of,' groaned Ruddle. 'And there's no one here that I know; and I don't know where I am or what I am, or where I got these disgusting clothes from, or where we are, or anythin' about anythin' whatsoever.'

The skipper gasped.

'You don't remember bein' a minister, and tellin' me that you had been a scaman and had had a bash on the crust with a shearpole from aloft that laid you out stiff, and when you come to you didn't rek'lect havin' bin a sailor at all, and that you then bore up for the Church and became a missionary? Oh, say you rek'lect, for if you don't I makes nothin' of it, and am most confused; and there is your wife in a dead faint down below.'

But Ruddle shook his head.

'I don't believe I ever was a missionary, for I always allowed they were a scaly lot. And I ain't married, and the girl that thinks I'll

marry her is away off her true course by points. But I say, how long do you reckon I was minister?’

He held on to the ‘old man’ as if he was holding on to sanity, and implored an answer.

‘We’ll ask your pal,’ said Gray, and he bellowed down the companion for Chadwick, who came on deck with his eyes bolting.

‘Is that my pal?’ asked Ruddle in great disappointment. ‘Why, I never saw him either.’

Poor Chadwick burst into tears.

‘Oh, this is dreadful, this is very dreadful,’ said poor Chadwick. ‘What shall we do? Our chief stay and strength is gone from us, and doesn’t know even me that married him.’

Ruddle stared, and then rushed at him and held him in the grip of a bear.

‘Steady, mister, are you speakin’ truth or are you gettin’ at me?’

‘It’s the truth,’ said Chadwick.

‘Then how long was I in your business? Tell me straight, or I’ll sling you overboard right now.’

‘Eight years,’ squealed Chadwick; ‘and there’s all of us downstairs can testify to the same.’

Ruddle sighed, and looked at the raging sea and at the skipper and at Chadwick, and up aloft. After a long silence he spoke.

‘If I’m right, the year’s eighteen-ninety, and if you are right it must be ninety-eight or more, accordin’ to the time it took me to get my certificate as missionary. What year is it?’

‘Nineteen hundred, so ‘elp me,’ said the skipper; ‘and I’ll have up the Nautical Almanac to show you.’

But Ruddle took their word for it, and sniffed a little, and then remarked—

‘I do think my beard wants trimmin’. And am I mad now?’

‘No, no,’ said the faithful Chadwick, ‘you aren’t mad, and in a little while it will all come back to you, and you will come back to us, and we’ll all be happy, even Blithers.’

‘Who’s Blithers?’ asked Ruddle sadly. Yet he did not wait for an answer. Though the *Wave* was now hove to under her main-topsail, with the foreyards checked in, and was fairly comfortable, the gale instead of moderating let another reef out, so to speak, and was a regular sizzler.

‘I should like to see that main-topsail goose-winged, sir,’ said Ruddle suddenly, ‘for if we are off the Cape, as you all seem to think, this is by no means the worst of it, and it will be a real old-fashioned scorcher.’

The ‘old man’ looked at him.

'Do you know the mate's arm is broke?'

'No,' said Ruddle.

'Well, it is, and he ain't fit to do a thing, naturally, and that means I haven't a mate.'

Ruddle looked pleased for the first time since he came back to his old sea-self.

'You don't say so. Well, that is fortunate,' he said with a happy smile. 'This is what I call real luck. I'll be the mate, sir, till you can get another.'

'Right,' said the skipper. 'And if you like you can goose-wing the topsail, Mr. Ruddle. I reckon you're right about the weather. We have enough parsons aboard to make old Davy Jones do his best.'

And Ruddle, with a happy flush on his face, bellowed from the break of the poop for the watch to lay aft. They heard his voice with amazement and came very lively.

'Haul up the lee clew of the lower main-topsail,' said the new mate, and going down on the main-deck, he saw the gear manœuvred, and started the sheet, and then lent his gigantic strength to get the clew chock up.

'Jump aloft and goose-wing it,' said Ruddle to the bo'sun, and the men jumped and did as they were told with extraordinary agility. They said it was a miracle, and so it was. But Ruddle was quite happy for a moment, and when they were down on deck again he turned to the skipper and laughed, positively laughed.

But the 'old man' did not even smile.

'I'm thinking of the poor little lady down below, Mr. Ruddle,' he said with a sigh. 'What are you goin' to do about her?'

A look of great determination came over Ruddle's face, and the smile died out of it.

'If I married, and I don't believe I did, when I was dotty through bein' hit on the crust, I ain't goin' to acknowledge it,' said he with firmness. 'I ain't the same man, that's obvious. And as I don't know the lady, the situation would be uncommon awkward for her and for me, and I think the best thing is for nothin' further to be said.'

The skipper was very doubtful as to whether this was the proper way to look at it, and he expressed a very decided opinion on what the lady would say.

'I'm a married man myself,' said Gray, 'and I own I have a wife that is a jewel, but what she would say if I said I didn't know her, owing to some accident at sea, fair inspires me with dread. I don't believe Mrs. Ruddle will put up with it, and you'll have a holy time in front of you if she as much as hears that you think of trying it on.'

But Ruddle said he didn't care, and that he wasn't going to have a wife foisted on him, so there. And down below Chadwick was breaking the dreadful news to Susan Ruddle that her husband did not know her or anyone else, and that he had become a sailor with a remarkably unorthodox vocabulary, and when this was driven into the poor woman's mind she screamed, and almost fainted again.

'Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do?' she cried. And then Mr. Blithers, who had never liked Ruddle, said that he would put it right.

'I don't believe a word he says if he says he doesn't know us,' said Blithers angrily. 'I always thought he was not the man he wanted us to think. And as for that story of his, I never believed that either. I shall go on deck and tell him that he is a scoundrel.'

He did so. He crawled to the poop and emerged into the gale in which Ruddle was fairly revelling.

'Ruddle, you are a scoundrel,' said Blithers. 'I always thought so, and now I know it.'

Ruddle inspected him with great curiosity.

'I'm a scoundrel, am I?' asked the new mate. 'And what may you be?'

'Don't you dare say you don't know me, Ruddle,' said Blithers.

'I know you,' said Ruddle. 'I can tell by the cut of your jib that you are an infernal humbug of the first water. Get out of this before I hurt you!'

'I won't,' said Blithers furiously. 'I won't till you say what you are going to do about your wife, who is weeping about you now, and crying to you to come to her.'

'If you don't stop tellin' lies about me and ladies I'll throw you down into the cabin,' said Ruddle.

'Hypocrite, liar, and man of sin, I defy you!' said Blithers; and the next minute Ruddle had him by the neck and threw him into the cabin.

'Stand from under,' said Ruddle, and Blithers howled and fell, and turned over and over as he went, and at last came to a stop at the feet of Chadwick and the disconsolate wife.

'He threw me down, and he knew me,' screamed Blithers. 'He said, "I know you, and you are a humbug." He's just pretending.'

'I don't believe it, Mr Blithers,' wailed the unhappy woman. 'He was always a good judge of character even when he was at sea before. But I want to see him myself. I must, and I will. He'll know me. Oh, he must know me or I shall die!'

The skipper came down below.

'Oh, captain,' said Susan Ruddle, 'I want to see him. If he is the mate now, as you say, you must order him to come to me at once.'

'I will,' said the skipper. 'It's odd I never thought of that before, when he as good as said he declined to hear any more argument about wives and women, and let on that the girl that reckoned to marry him was likely to be disapp'inted. You cheer up, ma'am. I'll send him down sharp.'

'Leave me here alone,' said the discarded wife, who in spite of her grief looked as pretty as a picture. 'Leave me alone, please.'

Chadwick withdrew, and dragged the raging Blithers with him. As Chadwick said, if anyone could bring Ruddle back to a sense of the lost period of his youth, it was his wife, and if she failed it was likely to be a very remarkable business and no mistake about it. He told Blithers of other cases of the kind of which he had heard. On the whole, Chadwick was optimistic. But Blithers shook his head, and rather hoped that Ruddle would remain a sailor for the rest of his life.

'I never thought he was fit to be a missionary,' said Blithers. 'And instead of him, I ought to be looked on as the chief here.'

There was a sharp argument going on on deck in the meantime.

'I'll take charge of her, Mr. Ruddle,' said the skipper, 'and you can go below and see your wife, who is naturally anxious to see you.'

'I ain't in the least anxious to go below,' said Ruddle. 'In fact, if it's all the same to you I'd rather stay here till she's out of the way.'

'I don't like to think that you are a coward,' observed the skipper severely, 'but I'll be compelled to think so if you don't go at once and square things up in some sort of shape.'

'Well,' said Ruddle, 'that's all very well for you, sir, that ain't caught in the same nip. But I don't want to go. I don't know the lady, and I'm naturally shy, and the cold perspiration pours off me at the thought of it.'

'I order you to do your duty,' said the 'old man'. 'I order you to go below and soothe the lady.'

'Oh, Lord, oh, I say, I won't,' stammered Ruddle. 'I'd rather stay on deck all night.'

'You won't? That's mutiny, Mr. Ruddle. It is disobeyin' orders, it is refusing duty. I'd be very sorry to use severe measures with you, but if you don't go I'll have you put in irons and carried to her.'

'You don't mean that, sir, do you?'

'I mean it,' said the skipper. 'But I never did see such a man. I never knew anyone so unwillin' to see a pretty woman before.'

'Oh, is she pretty?' asked Ruddle anxiously.

'Rather,' said the 'old man'. 'Oh, a regular beauty, and no fatal

error. Dixon and Smith were both off their nuts about her when you came on board.'

'What's she like?' asked Ruddle. 'Tell me what she is like.'

'Well, for one thing, she has got the most beautiful golden hair,' said the skipper; 'and from the way it's coiled, tier on tier on her head, I should reckon she can sit on it easy.'

Ruddle sighed.

'Well, that seems all right,' he said. 'I was afraid I might have landed one of the half-bald kind I hate. I like 'em fair too. But go on, sir.'

'Her eyes are a very superior kind of blue,' said the poetical skipper; 'and in my judgment they don't stay the same kind of blue all the time, but changes like the sea when clouds obscure the heavens in a squall. I reckon she's mostly sweet tempered, but if you riled her it would not surprise me to learn that she could stand up for herself.'

'That's the way I like 'em,' said Ruddle. 'I never could abide the milk-and-water woman. But is she big or little?'

'Neither one nor the other,' returned the skipper. 'Speaking as a judge of them, I should say she is as she should be, not too little, not too big, but what you might call sizeable. And her complexion, of which I'm a judge, is quite remarkable. Oh, on consideration I should state with some firmness, that she's very pretty.'

'You comfort me a good deal,' said Ruddle; 'and if you still insist on my seein' her, I'll do it at once.'

'It's my duty to insist, Ruddle,' said the 'old man'. 'So down you go, and mind you behave. And don't be too stand-offish, for I can't abide to see tears, and never could, and as a result I've had much trouble in my life. And when it's fixed up, come and tell me all about it.'

And Ruddle started to see his wife with slow, reluctant steps.

'It's my firm belief that nothin' of this nature ever happened before,' said Ruddle, 'and my bein' nervous seems tolerable natural. I wonder, oh, I do wonder, if I shall like her!'

He descended the companion as slowly as if he were going to execution.

'Oh, Tom, Tom,' cried the lady who was, they said, his wife, and a cold shiver ran down Ruddle's back. He did not dare to lift his eyes, and stood there like a big schoolboy who has got into sad trouble and is much ashamed of himself.

'Oh, Tom, don't you know me?' cried Susan. She made an attempt to rise, which was very promptly frustrated by the gale. Ruddle lifted his eyes at last.

'If you please, ma'am, I don't think I do,' said he. Then he added in desperation, 'At least, not well, ma'am.'

The situation was too desperate for screaming, and Susan accordingly did not scream. She became dignified.

'I have been your wife for three years, and now you say you don't know me. If you don't know me, who am I, and what am I? Tom, sir, Mr. Ruddle, I pause for a reply.'

Poor Ruddle shook his head very sadly.

'It's mighty awkward, I own,' he said after some reflection; 'and I don't know what to do about it. I'm very sorry I don't know you, but I can't say I do, much as I'd like to oblige a lady that I'm bound to respect, as, according to the other gents in long-tailed coats, I'm married to her. But they say I was a missionary, and now I'm a seaman again, and maybe you don't care for those that follow the sea.'

'I don't mind anything,' sobbed Susan, who was wondering if she might tell her husband that she loved him, and would not care if he were a dustman. But somehow it did not seem quite proper to speak in that way to a man who didn't know her.

'Oh, please, don't cry,' said Ruddle in great distress. 'When a lady cries I never know what to do.'

'I think I'm almost glad you d-don't,' said Susan, and she smiled on him through her tears and looked very beautiful.

'The "old man" was right,' said Tom Ruddle, 'she's as beautiful as a picture, and just the kind I like. I don't think I could have bin' very dotty when I married her, and I wish I remembered somethin' about it. If I say I think she is pretty, I wonder whether she will be mad and think it a liberty. I think I'll try. They mostly like it.'

He approached her slowly.

'If I don't know you, what may I call you?' he asked diffidently.

Mrs. Ruddle gave a gasp.

'Don't you know my name? Oh, how very dreadful! I'm Susan, and you used to call me Dilly Duck.'

'Did I?' asked Ruddle. 'And why did I do that?'

Susan said she didn't know, but supposed that it was because he liked her very much.

'But I like you very much now,' said Ruddle, 'I really do; and I think you are very pretty, ma'am, if I may say so, and the situation is very awkward. I hope I ain't too forward, which has never been my way with ladies, I assure you.'

As it had taken Susan over a year to encourage him to the point of proposing, she felt sure that he was speaking the solid truth, and it touched her deeply.

'I'm very glad you think I'm pretty,' she said with the most charming modesty. 'If—oh, if you think so, perhaps you are not sorry that you are married.'

'But I don't feel married,' urged Ruddie desperately, 'and I don't know what to do about it. It's by far the awkwardest situation I was ever in by long chalks, and it beats me, it fair beats me.'

But surely there was a way out, thought Susan, and she wondered whether as his wife she might not suggest it.

'But you like me?'

'Oh yes, to be sure,' said Ruddie, 'and I quite understand how I came to marry you. That is, I can understand how I wanted to, but what fair licks me is what you saw in me. Perhaps it was my bein' a long-tailed parson. Was it, now?'

'Not in the least,' said Susan stoutly: 'it was because you were you.'

'But now I am't what I was, and you must find it very embarrassing, ma'am.'

'Well, I find embarrassing is your calling me "ma'am",' said Susan, with a snap that made Ruddie see that the skipper was right in other ways than in his judgment of the lady's beauty.

'Very well,' said Tom Ruddie in a great hurry. 'I'll call you Susan if you like.'

'Of course, I like,' said Susan; 'and if you like you can call me Dilly Duck too.'

But though Ruddie was much encouraged, he could not go so far as that all at once.

'If you won't, you might at any rate sit down near me,' said the fair Circe with the golden hair. And Tom sat down gingerly.

'I don't know what is to be done,' said he in a melancholy way. 'I suppose you agree with me, ma'am—Susan, I mean—that it is very awkward and most unusual? Looking it fair and square, I don't see a way out, unless—'

'Unless what?' asked Susan, with her eyes on the deck. She herself had an idea of the way out, but she wanted him to find it.

'It's very odd that I should feel as I do, as we have been married,' said Ruddie; 'but I'm that took aback by the facts as they show up against my present lights, that I seem in a dream, like as if I had sternway on me and was in a regular tangle. Tell me, when I was a missionary was I much afraid of you?'

Susan sighed and took him by the arm.

'I think you were a little afraid sometimes, Tom, especially if I was cross with you.'

'Ah, I daresay,' said her husband. 'And if I was scared of you at



times when I knew you, it seems natural, don't it, that I should be worse scared of you now that I don't?'

'But you aren't really frightened of me, darling, are you?' asked Susan, once more turning on the water-works.

'When you cry and call me that,' said Ruddle, 'I don't know where I am, and I want to——'

'You want to what?' asked Susan in the sweetest voice.

'I—I don't quite know,' stammered Ruddle.

'I know,' said Susan triumphantly.

'Oh no, you can't,' said Ruddle in great haste. 'I'm certain you can't, for it ain't possible.'

But Susan lifted her sea-blue eyes to his and shook her head.

'I do know, Tom. You want to kiss me.'

Tom gasped and stared at her. 'Well, you are clever,' he said, with the greatest air of admiration. 'I don't believe that any other woman would have guessed it.'

And Susan sat waiting.

'Well?' she said at last.

'Oh, may I?' asked Tom.

'Of course you may,' said Susan, once more looking at the deck. And he kissed her, and then took her in his arms while she wept.

'And you are sure you love me again?' she asked.

'It's most wonderful,' said Tom, 'but now I come to think of it, I feel as if I had always loved you, and no other woman can as much as get a look in. There was a girl in London that thought I was goin' to tie up alongside, but she's away off it, and I'll never marry anyone but you.'

Susan wisely forbore at that moment to make any inquiries about this other girl, of whom she had never heard till that moment, and she put her golden head against her husband's shoulder.

'I think I am quite happy, Tom,' she said, 'though I am very sorry you don't remember how happy we were when we were first married.'

Tom shook his head.

'I'm sorry for that too,' he replied, 'but it can't be helped, and we'll be happy yet if you really love me enough to marry me again.'

'But we are married, Tom,' said Susan.

'You may be,' said Tom, 'but I haven't the feeling of it, and I mean to ask that longtail to tie us up again, so that there can be no mistake about it. What do you say?'

Susan said he was a darling, and that she loved him more than ever, and was willing to be married to him a thousand times if he wanted it.

'And you don't mind my bein' a sailor instead of a missionary?' asked Tom.

'I much prefer it, so long as you don't go to sea,' said Susan; and leaving that to be arranged later, Tom Ruddle called the curious Chadwick from his cabin.

'I've fixed it up,' said Tom triumphantly. 'I've fixed it to rights, sir. My wife is goin' to marry me again, and we'd be much obliged if you would perform the ceremony.'

'It seems very irregular,' said Chadwick, 'but considering the very peculiar circumstances, I've no objection to make. It is really very wonderful. I congratulate you both. I must call the captain and tell him about it.'

When the second mate came on deck the 'old man' went below. As soon as he grasped the situation he turned to Susan with a grin.

'You brought him to his bearings pretty quick, ma'am, and I congratulate you. But then a pretty woman like you ain't the sort to go long a-beggin'. I knew you'd fetch him! When I described you to him, he bein' a judge of female beauty, I saw how it would be. Who's goin' to do the new hitching?'

Mr. Chadwick said he was going to do it.

'It's the first time I ever married the same couple twice,' he said; and Brother Blithers sat in the background and said it was uncanonical. But no one paid any attention to Blithers. The other missionaries chipped in with their congratulations, and said that they hoped Ruddle would still be one of them.

'Thank you, gentlemen,' said Ruddle, 'but I have too much admiration for you to think I can be one of you again. I have a cousin that's a shipowner, and when he finds that I'm alive and in my right sea senses, he'll give me a ship, for though I've never been skipper of anythin' yet, I hold a master's certificate. And my wife will go to sea with me.'

'Darling, I'll go anywhere with you,' whispered Susan. And then they were married, while the gale roared about them, and the good old *Ocean Wave* rode it out under a goose-winged main-topsail as comfortably as a duck in a puddle.

'It's all very wonderful,' said Ruddle, as he went on deck at four o'clock to keep his watch. The 'old man' said that it was.

'All the same I knew she'd fetch you,' said Gray. 'I think the worst of it is over. We'll be makin' sail in the mornin'. As this is your weddin'-day, Mr. Ruddle, I'll keep your watch to-night.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Ruddle. 'Lord, what a wonderful world it is.'

Mrs. Ruddle said so too.